Painting the Nude in Oils

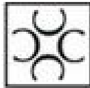


ADELE WAGSTAFF



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Frontispiece: *Monica kneeling*

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THE NUDE – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The nude within the context of western art and in particular within the tradition of European painting is now an accepted genre in its own right. Today, we are used to seeing images of the nude in painting from many different contexts and sources; from the art of the Ancient World to classical mythology, from biblical and historical painting to the nude becoming a subject of its own during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This continues to the present day as we see paintings of the figure, both clothed and unclothed within contemporary portraiture, images that examine human relationships, personality and psychology.



Drawing from a ‘fresco of lovers drinking,’ from Herculaneum.

As we begin our study of the nude in painting we will first look at how the portrayal of the nude has evolved throughout history. When did we begin to make representations of ourselves and for what

purpose?

In this chapter we will look at how painting the figure has developed through the centuries, from the earliest images to contemporary art. In doing so we will examine how different cultures have influenced the ways in which the nude is represented today.

Although notable sculptural examples will be discussed with their relevance and influence on the representation of the nude in painting, this chapter will primarily focus on the history of the nude in painting and other two-dimensional art forms such as wall painting, fresco and vases where a two-dimensional image is painted onto a three-dimensional surface.

This chapter is in no way intended to be a complete historical survey that includes every period, 'ism' and artist as we progress through the centuries. Some artists and schools have been omitted while others will be discussed in depth. The history of the nude is immense and is particularly rich with images from the early Renaissance onwards so the examples that have been selected have been intentionally limited. Many of the examples will be recognized as some of the greatest masterpieces we have of 'the nude', whereas others selected will be less known or more unusual within this genre.

The earliest figurative art

When were the earliest works of art created and why were these artworks made?

The first evidence we see of these early works of art is during the Stone Age or Palaeolithic Period. The oldest figurative art first appeared in Europe towards the end of the last Ice Age. The art from this time is sculptural and small in scale. These sculptures of humans and animals

are beautiful objects and in many cases are perfectly scaled-down images of the observed. A huge variety of figurative and patterned art has been found from this period. These artworks demonstrate how skilful and practised these early artists were in their craft and in showing the arrival of a complex and modern brain.

Huge swaths of Northern Europe at this time were frozen and desolate; this was isolated and dangerous territory. It was in these conditions that our early ancestors lived and began to create.

It was around 35,000 years ago that the many small carvings that we know today were produced. These ancient pieces were already showing an incredible level of artistry and refinement. The first examples of figurative painting are found on the walls of caves dating from *c*. 15,000–10,000BC; these show incredibly detailed representations of animals and humans.

The earliest sculptures to have been found in Europe include about 160 small-scale figurines, made of mammoth ivory and limestone. Some fine examples were discovered in the Vogelherd cave in south-west Germany. These objects show a stunning level of accomplishment, being inspirational to the centuries of artists that followed. A small sculpture of a horse found in the Vogelherd cave, made from ivory in *c*. 28,000BC, is an incredibly graceful piece – with its harmonious curves and flowing lines it has been beautifully observed from nature. Could a modern-day sculptor accomplish a piece of similar beauty?

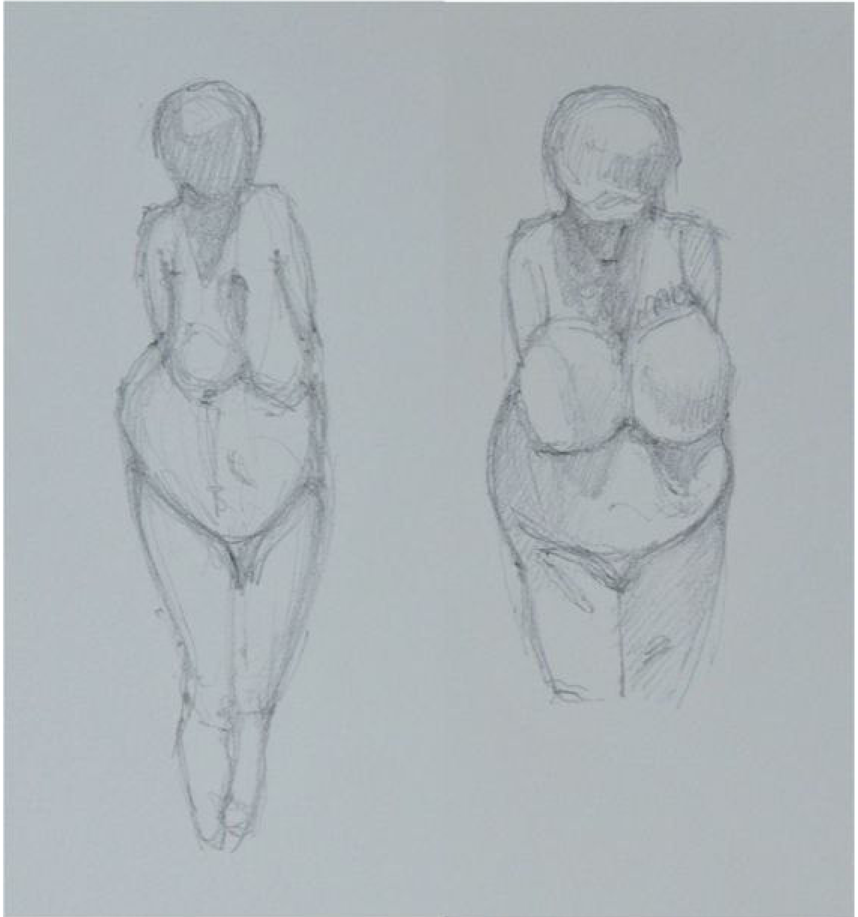
Of all these Prehistoric discoveries it is the small *Venus of Willendorf* (*c*. 25,000–20,000BC) that is one of the best-known pieces. She now resides in the Museum of Natural History in Vienna and is made of stone and is less than 11cm in length. This is a particularly fine example of an early nude. These figurines have initiated many theories of ancient rituals and magical properties, figures being used as symbols of fertility, for example. These small-scale hand-held treasures have been discovered in many sites across Europe, the majority of which are

in Spain and south-western France.

We don't know why these artworks were made and they seemed to serve no utilitarian function or purpose. Were the drawings and sculpture made purely in terms of 'Art', demonstrating the human impulse to create? Were they symbols of wealth, or used to show the people's deep spiritual relationship with animals and the environment?

When looking at these wonderful pieces what is evident is the artists' tremendous observational skills and that the artist was able to make formal artistic judgements, understanding beauty, craftsmanship and skill, using limited tools both made and found. Exquisite pieces were made that clearly show an understanding of perspective, weight and scale. In many pieces the movement of the animals and figures is clear and how light is used to describe the subtleties of form and volume.

It was the 2013 exhibition 'Ice Age Art' at the British Museum London, that enabled me to begin to understand the art of so long ago and to put this into context with work that was made during the following millennia and up to the present day.



Female figurines from the Ice Age.

Of this huge variety of figurative and patterned art over this period, beginning 40,000 years ago, these ancient artists demonstrated enormous artistry and craftsmanship and were highly skilled in

understanding the structure of the materials being worked. All the works from this time are small-scale, designed to be hand-held, touched and be passed from person to person.

The female figure

The female body is one of the most frequent subjects found in the sculpture of the Ice Age. All ages of women are represented from the youthful figure displaying her fertility and many that show the various stages of pregnancy or of giving birth. Although the focus seems to be on the reproductive body, there are many images of older women, past childbearing years. These small figures are naked, apart from jewellery adornments, and are made from a variety of materials including mammoth ivory tusks, antler, stone and ceramic and these have been found across Europe from France to Eastern Siberia.

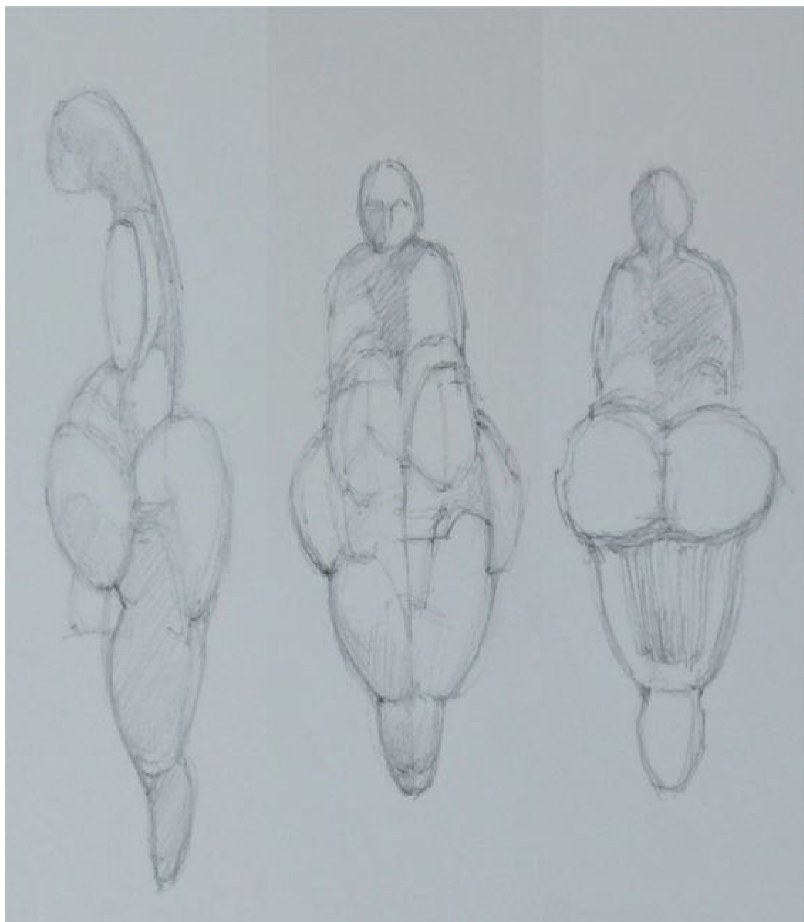
A ceramic figure of a mature obese woman, which was found in Doln Vestowice, Moravia, Czech Republic, is the oldest surviving example of ceramic sculpture in the world dating from 31,000–27,000 years ago. Although her form has been greatly simplified it clearly shows that it has been based from observation. The figure is in a standing pose, and is a celebration of curves, from her large pendulous breasts, enlarged hips, abdomen and buttocks. Even the fatty folds on her back and lower abdomen have been observed and shown.

Looking at these figurines with our modern eyes it is possible to see how they have influenced many artists of the twentieth century in the way that various aspects of the figure have been exaggerated or simplified. Artists including Picasso, Matisse and Moore began to represent the figure in such a way; simplifying the form, pulling apart the main structures of the body only to re-assemble it.

Often the figure has been simplified to the extent of showing the breasts and sexual triangle; when seen in profile the curve of the spine

is accentuated with the exaggeration of the shapes of the breasts and buttocks.

The figure shown here was made from mammoth ivory *c*. 23,000 years ago and has been simplified to its most basic geometry and then pieced back together. Picasso had three copies of this small female figure in his studio.



Studies of Ice Age figurine, three views – a copy of this figure was found in Picasso's studio.

Painting and the Ice Age

Whereas sculpture dates to approximately 35,000BC, the development of two-dimensional images began around 20,000 years later.

The climate began to warm at around this time, following an intensely cold period known as the Glacial Maximum and this was to coincide with a resurgence of artistic creativity. With it came a distinctive figurative art that emerged from this time as a 'Renaissance'.

Early drawing took the form of delicate carvings, lines etched into a flat prepared surface of bone or tusk. These earliest drawings etched in mammoth tusk, antler, bone and (later) on stone are remarkable in their execution. Lines are delicately incised into the surface of the bone, they are exquisitely delicate and fine, both beautiful and exact in their observation while retaining a fluency and fluidity of line we see in the drawings of Picasso and Matisse. Seeing these pieces in the flesh, we can only marvel at their beauty. The passing of the years only adds to their qualities, for example the discolouration of the bone or antler, and the chips and cracks that the piece has endured before rediscovery.

Animals etched in bone show lions caught in motion and gazelles running; any sense of movement is caught quite beautifully. The quality of the carving, craftsmanship and naturalism is astounding! What is so striking when looking at these images is how finely observed these incredibly early pieces are. Subtle cross-hatching is used to delicately describe form and volume.

The Worshipper is one of the earliest two-dimensional images of a figure, dating from about 42,000–40,000 years ago and found in Geissenklösterle Cave, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. This tiny tablet

of mammoth ivory shows a small image in low relief of a figure with their arms raised, shown in the act of singing, dancing, or praying?

The earliest paintings are images of man and beast on the walls found deep inside the caves of south-western France and Spain at Lascaux, Niaux and Altamira. These powerful and illusionistic paintings show how the shape and contour of the walls were used to create a strikingly realistic appearance, and how understanding of this three-dimensional effect could be used in painting.

Materials used during the Ice Age

The pigments used in the wall paintings are all natural earth colours, such as red ochre. Reds and yellows are iron oxides and these could be either made lighter or darker by mixing or by heating them. Red ochre when powdered can be mixed with water and then applied to the wall as paint.

Small pebbles were shaped and trimmed and used as ‘crayons’. Black was produced from charcoal and lumps of manganese dioxide.

As the Ice Age ended, the rituals and artistic practices adapted to such conditions began to fade, as new developments began to evolve.

The nude in Ancient Egypt

Egyptian wall painting

There are many sculptural representations to be found of the male and female nude in the art of Ancient Egypt. From early dynastic figurines, sculptures and reliefs carved on tomb walls, sarcophagi, palettes and temples, the numbers of three-dimensional and carved examples of the

figure are vast.

In 1933 caves were discovered in the Egyptian desert near the Libyan border which contain an incredible number of painted figures. These wall paintings in Wadi Sura are known as the 'Cave of Beasts' in which there are literally thousands of figures painted on the walls of the rock shelter. Another painted cave, which was featured in the 1996 film *The English Patient*, is also exceedingly rich in its imagery. This 'Cave of Swimmers' is so called due to the unusual recumbent position of many of the figures – they look as though they are 'swimming' in the desert.

The wall paintings in the Tomb-Chapel of Nebamun

The tomb-chapel of the ancient nobleman Nebamun was discovered in Thebes in 1820 and contains within its scenes some exquisite paintings of the nude figure. Nebamun was a wealthy Egyptian official who worked as a scribe and grain accountant in the granary of divine offerings and was based in the Temple of Amun in the huge complex of Karnak.

The wall paintings consist of eleven large fragments that are now contained and beautifully displayed in the British Museum, London. It documents the daily life and rituals of Nebamun, his family and guests. The paintings show scenes of banquets, making offerings, hunting and farming. These are magnificent examples which beautifully demonstrate how well observed and exquisitely detailed these works are; the drawing is exceptional and composition is perfectly balanced.

One of the many scenes on the tomb walls is one showing groups of musicians and young dancers entertaining the company. In Egyptian art the nude figure is used to depict those of a lower status including such dancers and musicians. Fishermen, prisoners, servants and children would also be shown nude. Here the young female dancers

are naked apart from their jewellery. A narrow band is slung low around the hips, arms are adorned with bracelets, and over the shoulders and around the neck is a heavy necklace.



Drawing of dancing girls from Nebamun's tomb chapel, British Museum.

The dancers are fluidly drawn and are beautifully lyrical in their execution. The rhythmic lines and the dynamic negative shapes around their arms and legs give a wonderful sense of movement. Young nude girls appear elsewhere in the company who appear to be serving the seated and elegantly dressed guests. Again they wear the same jewellery as the dancers. They hold out bowls of perfume and lengths of linen. Even the clothed figures of the seated guests are dressed with the light fabric elegantly falling in folds, which sensually describes the contours of the body.

In another scene, further along the wall Nebamun is depicted alongside his wife Hatshepsut; his pose is powerful as he stands with his legs wide apart. It is in the space between his legs that his young daughter is seen in a seated pose. She is the only figure in this composition seen nude and like the dancers she is adorned with jewellery.



Drawing of servant girl from Nebamun's tomb chapel, British Museum.

Roman mummy portraits

During the first three centuries ad a number of remarkable portraits were made of men, women and children living in Roman Egypt. Although these are portraits rather than images of the nude figure they are exceptional in their naturalism and in many cases the sense of observation and truth to nature. These two-thousand-year-old portraits painted in encaustic and tempera have been discovered throughout Egypt but the two main sites were in the Fayum region at Hawara and Er-Rubayat. Despite their age these haunting portraits are incredibly modern in their execution and it is as if we are looking at the faces of today.

The nude of antiquity

The art of Ancient Greece

The artists of Ancient Greece have given us some of the most visually stunning representations of the male and female nude that we have. The discovery of sculpture from antiquity was to inspire the re-birth of the heroic nude and had a profound influence on the artists of the Italian Renaissance. One such marble figure is the *Belvedere Torso* which was named after the court in the Vatican in which it used to be displayed. The sculpture still resides in the Vatican Museums and its influence can be seen in the strong muscular torsos of Michelangelo in particular.

This powerful marble torso is thought to be from the Hellenistic period of Greek sculpture and it is signed by the Greek sculptor 'Apollonius, Son of Nestor, Athenian'. The date of the sculpture's discovery is uncertain but it was well known in Rome by 1500.

The *Apollo Belvedere*, also in the Vatican Museums, is another inspirational marble statue of the Greek god Apollo which was discovered during the later part of the fifteenth century. This statue

has long been regarded as the absolute standard for male beauty – such is its perfection. The original figure was a bronze from the Classical or Hellenistic period and the marble we see today is a Roman copy.

One of the greatest works of antiquity that has inspired generations of artists is the marble *Laocoön and his Sons* (also in the Vatican Museums). Whether this sculpture is a Hellenistic original or another Roman copy has been long disputed but upon its rediscovery in Rome in 1506 it created an overwhelming reaction. Michelangelo is said to have gone to study it immediately. The complexity and drama of the piece, in which Laocoön, priest of Troy, and his two sons are being crushed to death by snakes was to greatly influence the Mannerist and Baroque periods.

The Early Archaic period of Greek sculpture shows the beautifully linear influence of Ancient Egypt; the same type of standing poses are echoed through the ideal bodies of young males who are shown nude.

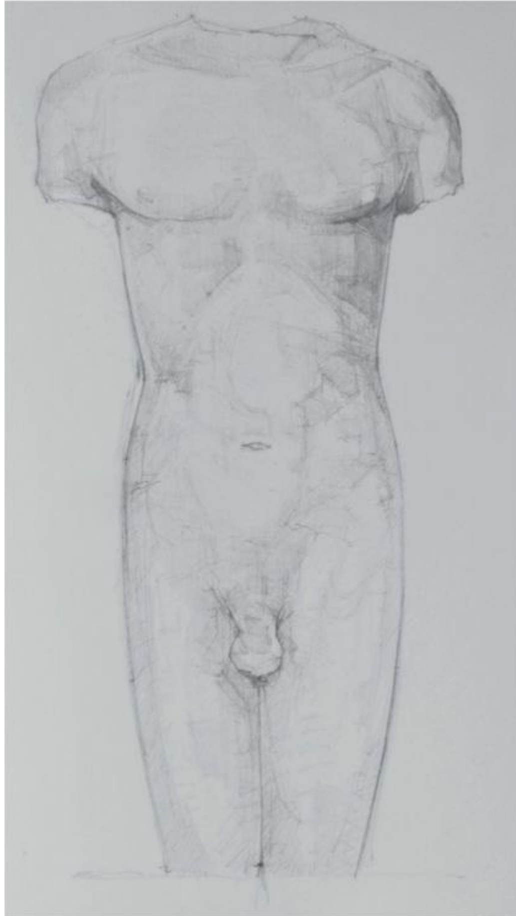
There is little remaining evidence of wall painting from Ancient Greece, but what we do have are Roman copies. Examples of such were found in the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum and show us how the wall paintings from Ancient Greece would have looked.



Study of a Roman copy of a Greek marble torso, Copenhagen Museum.

In museums around the world we can see images of thousands of figures, depicted both nude and clothed on the surface of elaborate vases, jars and plates dating from 520 to 300BC from Ancient Greece.

These curved and flat surfaces provide the stage for Gods, Goddesses athletes, heroes and muses alike, caught in scenes of action or in moments of calm.



Study of a kouros, from Ancient Greece, British Museum.

The painted surface of these pots almost appears as a theatrical 'stage-set', a frieze-like narrative showing groups of figures seen as if carved in bas-relief. Male figures are represented nude, or nearly nude, while women are depicted clothed and elegantly draped.

The vases fall into two groups: black-figured vases and red-figured. The painting process is simply reversed but the resulting images are strikingly different. In both instances the red earth colour of the clay is allowed to show through but used to very different effect.

On the black-figured pieces the background areas that surround the figures remain natural earthenware colour; it is the negative spaces that remain uncovered. A black glaze is painted onto the surface, completely filling the figures' shape. The entire figure appears rather flat with little form until very delicate lines are added. Very fine lines of red can be seen within the figures, describing details and shapes, these are created by carefully incising a line through the black paint uncovering the clay and giving a glimpse of its true colour. Details such as eyes, beards, drapes and linear suggestions of the edge of a muscle are delineated in this way. These lines are very finely executed, the most delicate of suggestions against the solid dark of the figure. The figures appear to be silhouetted against the rich red of the clay.



Back view of a kouros, British Museum.

On red-figured vases and ceramics it is the red-black relationship that is swapped around. It is the terracotta colour of the clay which now shows within the figures, while the background surface has been

covered in black. This black has a subtle sheen to its surface when compared to the flat tone of the terracotta. Details on the figures are picked out with very finely applied black lines that pick out facial features, facial hair, anatomical details and muscles, suggestion of drapes, swords and shields and so on. These delicately brushed lines are incredibly fine.

Greek vases greatly vary in shape and scale. Amongst the smallest are miniature amphorae measuring around 3–4 inches in height, while much larger urns and vases measure over a metre or more. Many of the surviving vases were made in Athens during a very productive period between 520BC and 400BC.

Painting in Ancient Rome: Pompeii and Herculaneum

The wall paintings that have been preserved from the ancient Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum are wonderful examples of the frescos that decorated and adorned both private houses and public buildings alike. Roman frescos depicted scenes of everyday life, and today they allow us to see what daily life would have been like. The walls of baths and temples, shops and brothels were painted with frescos.

Fresco is an Italian term meaning 'fresh'. It is a technique in which pigments after being mixed with water are added to wet plaster that has just been applied, hence the term fresh. As the plaster dries the pigment becomes part of the wall and any image becomes a permanent feature. This method of wall painting was common in Ancient Greece and Rome but it was also widely used in India and China. The stunning fresco cycle of the Italian painter Giotto di Bondone (*c.* 1267–1337) in the Arena Chapel Padua is one of the earliest examples of

fresco painting in the Western tradition and was to inspire many of the great frescos of the Renaissance.

Within a Roman house fresco decorations would often show images of a more intimate nature, showing scenes of lovers and a considerable amount of nakedness!! Images within the bedroom or cubiculum were intentionally erotic, often showing couples making love.

In the *Fresco of Lovers Drinking* (AD50–79) from Herculaneum, two lovers can be seen enjoying a quiet drink. The male and female figures are semi-clad, with their tunics loosely draped over their hips and thighs. A third figure is present within the scene, a servant perhaps. It was not unknown for the servant to also join in and take part!



Drawing from a *Fresco of Lovers Drinking*, from Herculaneum.

Romans were relaxed and generally comfortable with such scenes, often explicitly sexual in nature, decorating their homes. To our eyes today these images can seem to be overtly sexualized but to an Ancient

Roman these scenes would be conveyed as symbols of fertility and were at times rather humorous in their execution. As well as using fresco to decorate walls, the human body and scenes of human intimacy were also used to decorate objects, such as lamps and candlesticks.



Drawing from a *Fresco of a Couple Making Love*, Pompeii.

The beautiful *Fresco of a Young Woman* from Villa Ariadne, Stabiae (AD55–79) shows the single figure of a young woman who is seated on an ornate stool; she holds a mirror in her hand while she is fashioning her hair. She is shown almost completely nude, and her remaining clothes are loosely draped around her hips.



Drawing from *Fresco of a Young Woman*, from Villa Ariadne, Stabiae.

On close inspection it is possible to see how paint has been laid down over the plaster surface as small linear strokes describe the contours of her arm, abdomen, breast and neck. Longer linear strokes describe the direction and folds of the drapery gathered below her waist.

Fresco of a Woman, also from the Villa of Ariadne, Stabiae (30BC–AD50) is an incredibly delicate and beautiful painting. Here we see 'Flora', the goddess of fertility and abundance and in this image she is portrayed as the embodiment of spring. The painting is one of four images that would have decorated a Roman bedroom.



Drawing from *Fresco of a Woman*, from Villa Ariadne, Stabiae.

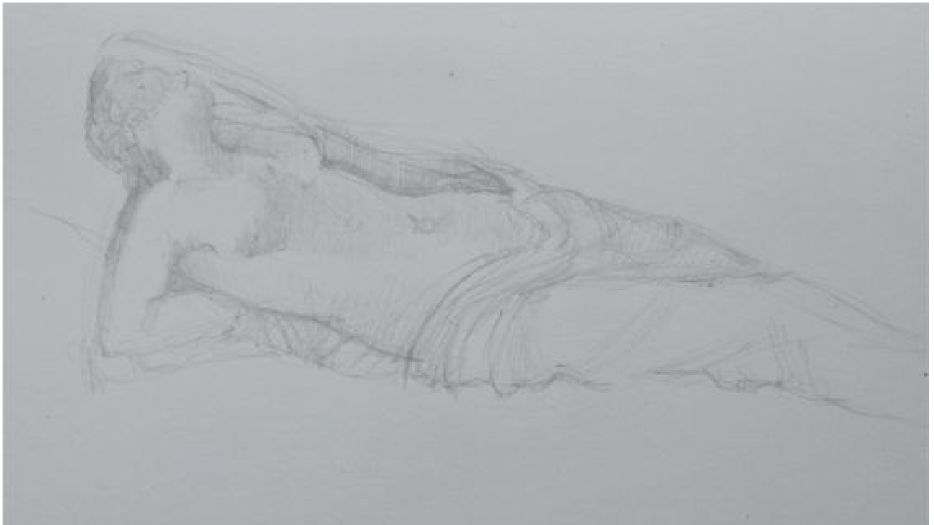
We see the figure of Flora from the back placed against a pale, delicate shade of green. She appears to be walking away from us, with her head turned away and angled downwards. Although this is not a

painting of a nude figure, her yellow tunic suggests the contour and shape of her form along with a white mantle which flows around her.

This is a simple composition; its clarity and simplicity make it Stabiae. all the more beautiful. The figure is placed centrally within the space and although the piece is small in scale there is still a lot of space surrounding the figure. She looks strikingly modern in her conception to today's eyes.

The Garden Room

The beautiful frescoed walls of the garden room belonged within a single room in a family home which was known as the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii and was discovered in 1979.



Drawing of a reclining figure from the Garden Room, Pompeii.

These frescos are not on permanent display in a museum but they travel the world where they are exhibited regularly, including the British Museum exhibition *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (2013). Amongst the flora of the frescos of the garden room we see pendants that contain small heads or *herms*. High up on the walls, above the trellis-work, are two fine elegant pilasters and on each we can see two herms, female on the left and male on the right.

The frescos adorning the walls of the garden room are exquisitely detailed and show us a diverse array of fauna and flora. Each part of the wall is covered with images of the plants, flowers and birds found in a Roman garden.

On each of the left and right walls as you enter the garden room there are two small rectangular panels, each of which contains a reclining semi-nude female figure. In the left image on the left-hand wall, a woman is half reclining against a small pilaster, her head turned towards the right. In the right panel the female figure lies fully reclining and her head, which is tilted upwards, is wreathed in garlands.

The upper body of the reclining female figure in the left-hand panel is nude and her garments are gathered around her lower half. We see how her pale translucent skin shines out when seen against the dark green tunic underneath her. The female figure's legs are covered; the folds and creases of the fabric describe the contours of her legs while her red hair further accentuates her pale skin.

The reclining figure in the right panel leans back on her elbow and her head is adorned with a floral arrangement. Her abdomen and breasts are also uncovered; her skin, which is very pale, is painted in white and a cool green. Again her legs are covered with a drape, this time pale lilac in colour. This fabric runs along both sides of her hips and upper torso, its colour accentuating the cool tones of her skin as it outlines her contour.

On the opposite wall a third figure is shown reclining and is

represented as if she is lying in a hammock of some type. Here the figure is nude and we see her hips and thigh. Her lower knee is held within an orange drape that echoes the colour of her hair. She leans on one arm, which creates a diagonal through her form and the drape on which she reclines follows that of her reclining position.

The northern Renaissance and the nude

There are few examples of the nude in painting between the turn of the millennium and the beginnings of the Renaissance. In the Gothic art of twelfth-century France emphasis was placed on imagery of the Virgin Mary and Christ child. Christian iconography dominated the art of the centuries that followed and the only suggestion of the nude and figures that were modestly draped were seen in religious scenes such as the Infant Christ, Baptism of Christ, the Crucifixion and the Pietà.

Painting to the North of Italy flourished during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This period of painting in Flanders, Northern France and Germany has become known as Early Netherlandish painting or the Northern Renaissance, a period which straddled both the Italian Early and High Renaissance. Imagery of the nude became more frequent and was often used in religious scenes such as the Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian and those which depict sinners, such as in the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the condemned in the Last Judgement.

Rogier van der Weyden (*c.* 1399–1464)

One of the most remarkable paintings of the Last Judgement is Rogier

van der Weyden's *Last Judgement* which is also known as the Beaune Polyptych. This large nine-panel polyptych (oil on panel, 1443–51) is now housed in the Musée de l'Hotel-Dieu, Beaune in Eastern France. It was commissioned by Nicolas Rolin, who was the powerful chancellor to the Duke of Burgundy, for the Hospices de Beaune, a hospital for the poor founded in 1443 by Rolin.

The figures of Christ and the Archangel Michael are placed in the central and largest panel of the polyptych. The Archangel Michael holds a weighing scale and as the dead rise from their graves their souls are weighed. The dead are placed within the lower section of the polyptych. The figures on both sides are depicted nude, the forgiven and the damned. Each figure has been painted with a heightened sense of realism and with great attention to detail.

On the two outer panels are Heaven and Hell. The righteous make their way to the gates of Heaven, kneeling with their arms raised and hands clasped in thankfulness whereas the damned, who are positioned on the right side, make their way down to Hell. A desperate tangle of figures falls downwards, with their angular and contorted poses emphasizing their despair.

Two drawings from the right-hand section of the painting show two of the female figures seen in isolation. The first is bent over, seemingly falling. With her lower hand she tries to save herself while her raised hand pushes against the back of the man in front who has already begun his fall into the abyss. His expression is one of terror. The diagonal of the woman's widely out-stretched arms make a cross with the angle of her back. To complete this tension, a hand rises up and pulls her hair downwards so there is no way of escape. The second female figure has already begun her fall and with her arms flailing behind her all hope is lost as she screams.



Study of a female figure from the *Last Judgement* after Rogier van der Weyden.



Study of a female figure from the *Last Judgement* after Rogier van der Weyden.

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553)

The nude does not feature in Northern European painting in the heroic manner that it does in Italian art. The German painter Lucas Cranach the Elder produced some of the most unique images of the female nude at this time.

Cranach's painting *The Close of the Silver Age* (1527–30) painted in oil on oak panel is an unusual subject matter for this small yet complex

composition that shows a crowded scene containing naked men, women and children. In the background two men are beating other men violently and whilst one woman looks on in apparent concern the other women and children don't appear to be too worried by this act of violence. This subject is drawn from classical accounts telling of the age before civilization and from other popular representations of such 'primitive' people.

The tangle of figures overlapping each other is very linear in approach: lines running through each pose dominate, almost becoming frieze-like. The negative spaces have become flattened against the shapes of each figure; closer inspection reveals minute attention to detail of nature – every blade of grass, stone and leaf has been portrayed with great accuracy.

As seen in many of Cranach's female nudes, great attention is given to contemporary fashion and here a woman wears a fashionable modern headdress. There is a theatrical feel to the figures in the composition as the stillness in the front figures contrasts with the more rhythmic tension in the poses of the figures behind.

Cranach's beautiful female nudes are quite unique: they are classical, seductive and elegant. Their shapely lines are often enhanced by the figures being placed against a stark yet rich black background.

His painting *Cupid Complaining to Venus* show Venus as an idealized female beauty. The two figures of Venus and Cupid are shown standing amid flora and fauna; the rhythmic lines of the pose of Venus contrast with the verticality of the tree and the more upright pose of the small Cupid, who looks up at his mother complaining that he has been stung by bees whilst out collecting honey. Again, this painting shows a classical subject but Venus is attired in a large hat and necklace of contemporary fashion.

The heroic nude and the Renaissance

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)

The culmination of the ideals and philosophies of the High Renaissance are witnessed in Michelangelo's masterpiece, the Sistine Chapel. In these frescos we clearly see the influence of the art of antiquity, particularly the art of Ancient Greece with the fusion of natural beauty and ideal beauty brought together.

In 1508 Michelangelo (1475–1564) began the huge task of the painting of the vaulted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, Rome. Scene by scene, he interpreted the story of the Divine Creation using imagery in terms of Neo-platonic philosophy, which emerged during the Renaissance. There was a great revival in the interest of classical antiquity and as a result of this, Platonism underwent a revival and this was particularly strong in Florence under the rule of the Medici.

The Creation of Adam (*c*. 1510) is one of the most iconic of all images within art history. Adam reclines and it is as if he is carved in marble, and he is shown at the moment when God instilled life in him. He is depicted in a very sculptural manner; with such form and weight it is as if he were a heroic classical figure on part of the Parthenon frieze. The figure of God the Father is placed almost horizontally, echoing the diagonal of Adam. This is the first time we see God placed in this way in the history of the painting of this subject. The line created by the two outstretched arms leads the eye through the composition. The focus of this composition is the placement of the two hands that reach out towards each other, its tension created as they almost touch.

The figure of Adam is the embodiment of perfection, his youthful

body portraying the ideal. Michelangelo through analytical observation and using his knowledge of anatomical structures is able to show through the bodies' proportions its supreme and divine harmony.

The Sistine Chapel*Last Judgement* (1536–41) is a very different scene from the Northern European version of the same theme painted by Rogier van der Weyden. Here the tumbling, powerful figures of Michelangelo contrast with the quietness of the linear figures painted by Van Der Weyden.

Following his completion of the frescos of the vaulted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo was commissioned to paint the huge altar wall in 1534. This painting, which measures 12m by 13.5m, is the largest work of art to be completed by a single person. Pope Julius II had originally commissioned a depiction of the Resurrection of Christ for the altar wall and it is unclear when this was changed to the theme of the Last Judgement.

In the centre of the composition there is a muscular and powerful Christ, pronouncing his last judgement upon humanity. His huge arm is raised at the moment of judgement; we do not see him portrayed as suffering or gentle, but as a powerful and commanding young man. Around Christ the composition is arranged in a circular fashion as the figures of the scene revolve around him. The dense circle of figures placed closest to him are saints and apostles and their scale is huge within the composition.

The blessed are placed on the left side, rising upwards while the damned are placed in the lower right of the picture dropping down to hell. The figures throughout this enormous fresco create a huge amount of movement as they move upwards from the left and down on the right side. These figure scenes are intensely crowded, as they struggle and fight they tumble in all directions. Some figures float, while others are being pulled up, no figure remains still. The movement down the right-hand side is violent as the damned are cast down.

In his depiction of so many figures, who fly, twist and tumble, Michelangelo demonstrates his outstanding knowledge of anatomy. His knowledge of how the muscles of the body contract and expand allowed him to realistically render each body in movement, foreshortened and in perspective. Michelangelo is said to have claimed that he never used the same pose twice!

These later figures of the Sistine Chapel are muscular and solid heavy and bulky, and are quite different from the earlier figures on the ceiling where the artist's concern was with ideal perfection and the nude. The tension, emotion, along with the strained poses of the nudes we see here are moving toward the Mannerist period that followed the Renaissance.

When the *Last Judgement* was finally unveiled, it was criticized because of the vast amount of nudity that it contained.

The study of anatomy

The anatomy drawings of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

Leonardo's scientific research is now as well known to us as his drawings and paintings. It was during the latter part of his life that Leonardo began to work on his treatise of human anatomy. At the time of his death in 1519 the treatise hadn't been published but what remains amongst his sketchbooks and personal papers are some of the finest anatomical drawings ever produced.

By 1510 Leonardo was known to be dissecting in the Medical Schoo of the University of Pavia. Until this time Leonardo had been unable tc find enough cadavers to work from, but his work within the Medical School provided him with enough bodies to dissect, analyse and to make his remarkable drawings. Had his anatomical treatise been published it would have transformed the study and understanding of

human anatomy in Europe.

The pages of Leonardo's sketchbooks are densely packed with information, exquisite drawings alongside curious writing seen in mirror-image. This was a habit Leonardo had acquired from childhood as he was left-handed, and was not done to keep his research a secret, as is often thought.

Leonardo was tireless in his exploration of the human body, making page after page of fine drawings from acutely observed dissections. To artists today Leonardo's anatomical drawings are a marvel to see. Not only are they beautifully observed and exquisitely drawn, they provide us with huge amounts of information about the human body, in particular its superficial anatomy. It is this *surface anatomy* which is useful to us as artists, as it enables us to see how surface landmarks correspond with deeper structures within the body that cannot be seen. It is this superficial anatomy that helps us to understand and check human proportion and form.

The catalogue *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man*by Martin Clayton and Ron Philo (Royal Collection Trust, 2013) beautifully illustrates each sketchbook page alongside Leonardo's dissection notes which have been both translated and reversed.

The drawing shown here was made when standing directly in front of Leonardo's sheet, and shows us the muscles of the shoulder and arm. The copy was made of the second specimen from the right which shows the back of the shoulder and the trapezius muscle running from the scapula up to the spine, the rounded deltoid muscle and the muscles and tendons running along the arm.



Study of the muscles of the shoulder after Leonardo da Vinci.

The next drawing shows the frontal view of the muscles of the shoulder, arm and neck. The drawing was again made when standing directly in front of one of Leonardo's sketchbook pages when in an

exhibition. This particular study was made from the third drawing from the left of the page and focuses on the deltoid, pectoralis major and muscles of the upper arm and forearm.



Study of the frontal view of muscles of the shoulder, arm and neck after Leonardo da Vinci.

Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*

One of the most important works of nineteenth-century French Romantic painting is the *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) by Theodore Géricault (1791–1824). Géricault was of the most original and influential painters of Romanticism. His *Raft of the Medusa* is a monumental painting in every way. It measures almost 5m by 7m and depicts an event of such human tragedy it caused a great furore when it was first exhibited; it showed great realism in the horror and suffering not only of the event itself but also of the political implications that followed.

The painting shows a scene from a contemporary event with the grandeur of the greatest of Romantic images. In 1816 a French Roya Navy frigate set sail for Senegal but it never reached its destination The ship ran aground on a sandbank and there were not enough lifeboats so a raft was built for the remaining 150 men and this sailed for thirteen days. Only ten souls were to survive. Géricault's scene shows the moment of lost hope when the shipwrecked sailors spot a rescue ship on the horizon, but it sails away.

Géricault researched his subject extensively, making many studies to finalize his complex composition. As part of this research he spent a great deal of time studying anatomy from dissected cadavers in his studio in preparation for his contorted composition of figures and corpses. As a result of this study, Géricault was to produce a number of painted anatomical studies which include the remarkable still life arrangements of severed limbs and heads. These are macabre in their treatment yet they are also painted with the greatest sensitivity.

The mythological and allegorical nude

Throughout the history of painting there are a great number of examples depicting scenes from classical mythology. The gods and heroes of these myths have inspired some of the greatest artists in European art; from Botticelli to Giorgione, Rembrandt to Titian, these painters have interpreted the allegories and stories of the ancient world into scenes which could also be translated into more modern narratives.

Ovid's Metamorphoses inspired Titian's great mythological works *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*. In *Diana and Actaeon* (1556–59) Titian selects the moment when Actaeon accidently interrupts Diana as she secretly bathes surrounded by a group of sensual and voluptuous female nudes. The drama of the scene is enhanced by the rhythmic poses of the figures and the subtle yet sparkling light which touches their skin. Titian's fluid brushwork and his use of vivid colour further animate the movement and drama within this painting.

Giorgione (c. 1477–1510)

The Tempest is one of Giorgione's last paintings, and the allegorical meaning of this late work is still unsure. Is this a scene from Classical mythology, for example Oenone and Paris, from Ancient Greece or could it represent the flight into Egypt?

This painting, which is in the collection of the Gallerie dell' Accademia, Venice, shows a female nude seated on the right of the composition. She is placed within an elaborate landscape, a white drape is placed around her shoulders and she has an infant at her breast. Her pose is unusual as the infant is held behind her leg as if she is shielding him from us rather than across her lap and hiding her own body. While she looks directly out of the scene at the viewer she is being observed from within the scene; a young male figure in the

bottom left of the composition gazes over at her. Both figures are quite small in scale, set within the dominant landscape.

The painting was described in 1530 as a 'Landscape on canvas with storm, gypsy woman and soldier'[1]. Whilst studying the painting further it was discovered that the standing male figure was originally a second nude, which was revealed by x-ray.

Colour is used expressively throughout the painting; modulations from one colour to the next serve to replace almost all lines. This paint handling and use of colour looks ahead to that of fellow Venetian Titian's mature work.

Neo-Platonism and Botticelli in fifteenth-century Florentine painting

The graceful and elegant paintings of the Florentine Sandro Botticelli (1444/5–1510) demonstrate a delicacy of line which originates from the Gothic period and absorbs the ideals of beauty in the revival and interest of Platonic philosophy during the fifteenth century.

Two of Botticelli's most famous paintings, *The Birth of Venus* (*c*. 1485) and *La Primavera* (*c*. 1477/78), both in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, revive ideas from Classical antiquity and Platonic philosophy. The patron who commissioned these two paintings was Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (who was second cousin of Lorenzo the Magnificent). Botticelli's paintings reflect the changes that were taking place during the second half of the fifteenth-century in Florence. The powerful and influential Medici family had strong interests in Platonic philosophy and this was to influence the commissioning of large-scale paintings which broke away from divine subjects and instead encouraged a more secular content.

Platonism regarded beauty to be the witness of the divine and as a

result of this, gods and goddesses of antiquity were found to be familiar in expression and image to those from a more sacred iconography. The image of Venus and that of the Holy Virgin became almost interchangeable, as it was not considered to be a blasphemy if a similar facial type was used.

Neo-Platonism grew out of this revival of Platonic philosophy when combined with ideas within Christianity.

Botticelli's reinterpretation of the mythological love scene of *Venus and Mars* (c. 1480) which today hangs in the National Gallery London, demonstrates the Neo-Platonic ideal of beauty. Mars, the God of War, is shown sleeping as he has been conquered by Venus, the Goddess of Love. Understood in Platonic terms this painting shows that love has conquered war and violence and the naked Mars has surrendered all thoughts of war, as the fauns positioned behind the couple have taken all of his weapons.

The active pose of Venus balances beautifully with the passive pose of Mars. The two figures are almost seen as mirror images of each other as they are placed within a long narrow rectangle. A beautiful and harmonious composition is created as the pose of the two figures make an inverted triangle, its geometry is completed by the position of Mars' lance held by the fauns along the top of the image.

The pose of the reclining Mars, with his raised top leg and leaning on one arm can be seen as an early influence for the *Creation of Adam* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling painted some thirty years later. The pose is then reversed but there are strong similarities between the languid pose of Mars with that of Adam.

The erotic nude

Giorgione (c.1477 – 1510)

The *Sleeping Venus* remains one of the most beautiful and sensual images of the female nude in Western painting. Now in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, she is also known as the Dresden Venus and is one of Giorgione's last works. The painting remained unfinished at the time of the artist's death and it is now accepted to have been completed by Titian in 1510.

The female nude is now a widely accepted genre in its own right and since the painting of Giorgione's *Venus* there have been many exquisite works of art that have followed. From Titian to Velàzquez and Goya to Manet, the reclining female form pays homage to this first recumbent nude of Giorgione.

Throughout the art of antiquity, the female nude was rare. Marble sculptures of the female nude show her standing, her hands often placed to cover her breasts and genitals as echoed by Botticelli in his *Birth of Venus* (*c.* 1485). The reclining female nude now seen so frequently in art studios and exhibitions was a product of the Renaissance.

In Giorgione's painting the lyrical lines of the extended pose echo those of the landscape beyond. Venus lies with her eyes closed, oblivious to the spectator's gaze upon her. Unlike many other nudes that followed her, she is totally naked of any adornments – no jewels, bracelets or necklace are seen. She lays back on a rich red drape and below her is a silvery satin, its cool tone increasing the warmth of her skin. One arm is raised and with her left hand covering her modesty, it is also suggestive of other pleasures.

The pose of Venus does strike similarities with a small figure placed within the *Roman Fresco from a Room (North Wall) Showing Garden Scenes*, found in the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii. Although this figure is not fully nude, the lower part of her torso and legs are draped in fabric, and she reclines with one arm raised behind her head. This small image shows a maenad, a female follower of Bacchus, and the small panel which holds her is supported by a male

herm, a small stone marker with the face of a satyr.

Titian (*c*. 1485–1576)

Titian's beautifully seductive painting of the *Venus of Urbino* (1538) in the Uffizi, Florence, draws immediate comparisons with Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*. Here the influence of the earlier Giorgione can clearly be seen in the pose of the reclining woman, and the placing of the figure within the rectangle is the same. Titian, however, places his *Venus* within an interior, a sumptuous room with the grandeur of a Renaissance palace. Titian also places his goddess on drapes of crimson and white and the balance of tones within each of the paintings is similar throughout.

Whereas Giorgione's Venus has her eyes closed, lost to her thoughts, Titian's Venus looks directly out at us, her gaze meets ours and she draws us in, inviting us to look. Venus holds some roses in her right hand; a flower has fallen onto the bed. Her left hand is placed over her groin, echoing Giorgione's pose once again, further enhancing the eroticism of the painting.

Unlike the totally nude *Sleeping Venus* this Venus is adorned with jewellery – a bracelet, ring and the glimpse of light reflecting from an earring all make this young woman more contemporary in feel. The placing of the goddess in an interior rather than within the landscape also serves to make this woman belong to the real world. There are two women in the background, searching for clothes in a chest, further implying the status of this woman as a beautiful young courtesan.

This painting was commissioned by the Duke of Urbino, possibly in celebration of his forthcoming marriage and the model for this painting was Angela del Moro, a Venetian courtesan.[2]

In Giorgione's painting the lines of the landscape accentuate the lines of the nude, whereas in Titian's interior, the vertical and

horizontal lines serve to make the curves of the woman all the more voluptuous.

The nude in Spanish art

Diego Velázquez (1599–1660)

One of the most familiar images of the female nude in art history is the *Toilet of Venus* (otherwise known as the *Rokeby Venus*) painted by Diego Velázquez in 1647–51. Paintings of the female nude are very rare in Spanish painting at this time, and this is the only surviving example by Velázquez. His *Toilet of Venus* was painted after the artist came into contact with Venetian painting, most notably the work of Titian. Velázquez began to refine his style by applying touches of overlapping colour over the surface with direct and fluid brushwork.

In the painting we see Venus reclining on a bed while positioned in the top left of the composition is her son Cupid holding up a mirror towards her. In the reflection we see her face, suggesting that Venus is looking out and observing the viewer rather than looking at her own reflection.

Venus lies on a sumptuous bed of drapes and behind Cupid and the mirror is a drape of red velvet. This shape creates a triangle which contains the reclining figure. This compositional element is used to contain our eye as it moves around the painting. The red serves to bring the eye back to the figure, then across to Cupid, the mirror and then returning to the nude.

Francisco de Goya (1746–1828)

The painter Goya is known for his portraits, scenes of everyday life used as social commentary, and religious works along with many series of etchings commenting on and portraying the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. The young Goya studied the paintings of Velázquez, whose influence can be seen in his lively paint handling as a more natural and personal style and expression, along with the more dramatic use of light and shade that became evident within his work.

Goya's painting of the *Naked Maja* (*c*. 1790–95) remains one of the most seductive and provocative nudes in all of the history of art. Goya painted two *Majas*, one nude and one clothed. In terms of colour, modelling, paint handling and attention to detail, the naked version is thought to have been painted before the clothed. Was the clothed *Maja* (*c*. 1803–05) commissioned afterwards to cover her nakedness? What was it that made the *Naked Maja* so shocking at the time? Here we see a young woman reclining nude, but she is depicted as a real woman and she looks out at us holding our gaze with the same directness of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and Manet's *Olympia*. This model is not shown as a goddess but as a woman at court.

Following the end of the Civil War Goya was summoned in 1815 before the Inquisition to answer to charges of obscenity. The obscenity in question related to certain obscene paintings; the two *Majas* were amongst these. The trial didn't continue any further and the two paintings eventually found their way into the collection of The Prado, Madrid.

Nudes of the Baroque era

The heroic nudes of antiquity, the harmonious proportions of the art of the Renaissance and the emotion and movement of the Mannerist period are brought together during the Baroque era which followed. These elements are all transformed into a dynamic and exuberant style

that developed throughout Europe from 1600 until the emergence of the flamboyant Rococo style in France during the 1700s.

The Baroque tradition spread out from Rome where it began with the great painters Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio and the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini. One of the finest examples of the Baroque outside of Italy is the work of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) who was working in Flanders during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Rubens' style was largely formed during his years studying in Italy where he visited many of the important art centres while working for the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga. Rubens worked intensively in Genoa and Rome before returning home to Antwerp where he set up his extremely successful studio.

Caravaggio (1571–1610)

The Flagellation of Christ (1607), a large painting now held in the Museo e Gallerie di Capodimonte in Naples is a powerful and dramatic image. The drawing here shows the contrast between the rhythmic linear pose of Christ's body against the weight and hard physicality of the man on the right. The figures are arranged rhythmically within the composition with deep dark voids of negative space adding to the drama of the scene. It is as if the figures are placed within a stage set, placed in a shallow space. This scene is truly sadistic in nature as the right torturer kicks behind Christ's right knee (which results in the graceful line of the torso being continued down through the legs) and the left torturer holds a handful of his hair in his tight fist; his expression is one of hate.



Study of *The Flagellation*, after Caravaggio.

Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606–69)

Rembrandt painted few female nudes during his career but those he did paint are remarkable in their sensitivity and fleshiness.

Rembrandt takes his central figure *Danae* from Greek mythology. Painted in 1636, it now hangs in the Hermitage, St Petersburg. This is a magnificent painting where the female figure is depicted life size. The original model for this work is the artist's wife Saskia, although her face was later changed to that of his mistress! As we look at this painting it is clearly painted from life: the female figure has not been idealized in any way – she appears curvaceous and totally natural in her reclining pose. She has the fleshiness of a Rubens or a Lucian Freud nude.

The academic nude

Drawing the nude and the seventeenth-century academy

Nowadays it is fairly easy to find a life-drawing course to attend. Life drawing is no longer something that you come across for the first time on an art foundation course, in preparation for portfolio building or college submission or as part of an exam. Life drawing is regularly taught in school sixth forms and colleges.

Accessing a nude model wasn't always so straightforward. It was in the European art academies of the seventeenth century that life drawing as an academic study was introduced for the first time. Drawing was studied intensively, and the student had to pass through a number of stages before drawing from the life model was allowed. The study of 'The Nude' was therefore an academic phenomenon with very strict and formal rules.

The first phase was the act of copying: a student would make

drawings from two-dimensional sources such as Renaissance paintings. Once the student had demonstrated proficiency when working from paintings and reliefs the second stage was to draw from three dimensions, for example casts and sculpture. Art academies had a ‘cast studio’ where students would work from casts of well-known sculptures. Up until the 1960s the Slade School of Fine Art had a cast studio where students would work and the Royal Academy Schools today still have an impressive range of casts that can be seen when visiting exhibitions there. Today the Cast Courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London continue to draw groups of students and artists, who draw from casts of medieval and Renaissance masterpieces.

It was only once students demonstrated competence when working from casts they would then be allowed to draw from the life model as this was considered not only to be the most elevated task for any artist, but also the most difficult and demanding. Once in the life room, the model would take a series of formal poses that would be carefully observed by the students.

During the seventeenth century the life room was a men-only environment and even then the models would wear some form of underclothing. It was much later when women were allowed into the life room. During the first half of the twentieth century, men and women worked in separate life rooms at the Slade School of Fine Art in London.

One of the greatest ‘copyists’ was the young painter Edgar Degas (1834–1917). Degas studied the Old Masters throughout his long career and his work is the result of this personal reflection. He made copies throughout his life and made it clear that he always thought of his work in terms of the Old Masters. As a student, he was told:

> Make copies, young man, many copies. You can only become a good artist by copying the masters.[3]

Ingres to Degas, 1855.

Degas, when working in the Louvre, drew from both paintings and sculpture. He studied the art of the past intensively. Copies were made after Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1859), Mantegna's *Calvary: Crucified Thief* (*c*. 1853–54), Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* (*c*. 1859–60) and *The Borghese Gladiator* (*c*. 1854–56). These are beautiful and sensitive drawings made from observation. The subtle modelling and rhythmic lines seen in these drawings along with the continued emphasis on the importance of drawing throughout his career resulted in Degas becoming an incredible draftsman, the strength of his drawing always underpinning his work.

Late in his career Degas told his dealer, Ambroise Vollard:

> One must copy and recopy the masters, and it is only having given every proof of being a good copyist that permission could reasonably be given to paint a radish from life.[4]

The modern nude

Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920)

Amedeo Modigliani was an Italian draftsman, painter and sculptor who spent many years working in Paris. His treatment of the nude is of a traditional subject with his portrayal of the figure having a much more modern take, as he uses poses from antiquity and the Renaissance with a contemporary vision and in doing so moves away from the 'ideal'. He studied the art of the Old Masters in Italy and he demonstrates the strong influence of Botticelli with the linear grace and elegance in his work.

Many of Modigliani's nudes are echoing poses seen throughout the

history of painting but in these figures we see a truth to reality. His nudes show pubic hair, not usual or indeed acceptable in the portrayal of Venus and the nudes from antiquity and the Renaissance. This truth to nature resulted in Modigliani's only one-man exhibition in 1917 being closed down following criticisms from a shocked public!

The nudes of Modigliani are elegant and sensuous, introspective and meditative in nature and the artist strove for Renaissance beauty and ideals within his painting. In doing this he felt that he was distancing himself from the more avant-garde and provocative art that was being produced at the time in Paris and elsewhere in Europe during the early part of the twentieth century.

A great number of Modigliani's muses cite poses seen throughout art history and this we see in his *Standing Nude, Venus* (1917) which echoes that of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1482 tempera on canvas in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) as this Venus' right hand also covers her breasts while her left hand covers her groin. This same pose is used again but reversed in Modigliani's *Seated Nude with Necklace*, also of 1917. The pose of Botticelli's *Venus* is once again quoted in the painting *Red-haired Young Woman in Chemise* (1918, private collection).

The painting *Nude with Necklace* (1917) clearly echoes the reclining nudes of Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1510) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (*c*. 1538).

These nudes show how Modigliani broke away from the rigorous and formal 'Academy' poses. His poses would not have been what the Academy would understand as a 'Nude'. His stylization and treatment of the human figure achieves its highest form in these works.

Whenever throughout art history a painter has dared to portray the figure too close to reality or is seen to be moving away from the 'ideal' there would be an outcry. If this standardized or accepted way of portraying the nude was flouted then it was viewed as an insult to the public's moral sensibilities! Uproars followed when the public first saw Goya's *Naked Maja* (1800), and Manet's *Olympia* (1863, Musée

d'Orsay). Manet was denounced for the overt sexuality portrayed in his painting *Olympia*, as naked she gazes out, meeting our eyes with no sense of shame.

The models we see in these paintings, although seen in poses from both mythological and classical sources, have been liberated from such traditional mythologies and are shown as modern individuals, represented both freely and, in many examples, erotically. Modigliani's female nudes show no sense of prudery and it is with these works that we begin to see the subtle transition between the portrayal of the nude and the naked in painting.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the portrayal of the 'naked body' in its own right, totally free of traditional allegorical and literary references, an independent genre within the academic tradition.



Reclining Nude.

A contemporary view

The naked and the nude

Throughout the twentieth century and to the present day the nude continues to be a focus in the work of many contemporary artists. The emphasis now, though, is often a preoccupation in showing the psychological presence and personality of the sitter.

In the final chapter of this book, 'The Naked Portrait', we will examine the work of a number of painters who are exploring and bringing together the portrayal of the nude figure and psychological portrait.

Where do the boundaries lie between a nude and a naked portrait? On the difference between the naked and the nude Kenneth Clark wrote:

> To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes and the word implies some of the embarrassment which most of us feel in that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous and confident body: the body re-formed.[5]

Often when we look at paintings of the nude figure, although we see the presence of a model we don't always get any further clues as to who they are, or have any sense of their personality within the painting.

In this final chapter the work of painters Egon Schiele, Stanley Spencer, Gwen John, Alice Neel, Lucian Freud and Euan Uglow will b discussed with particular examples of their work used to explore the difference between the naked and the nude in painting. In the work of these artists we are not only seeing a nude figure, but we are seeing the presence of each person, their personality. Examples of my own nudes and portraits will be discussed while demonstrating these influences and inspirations.



Seated Girl II.

CHAPTER 2

THE STUDIO AND MATERIALS

A number of practicalities should be observed when working with a life model. Whether you are working with a model on a one-to-one basis, or with other painters, you will need to make sure that your working space is a comfortable and safe environment for all those involved.



Seated Model in Studio, Anne.

Privacy

A model working with you, either modelling for the first time or very experienced, will expect privacy and respect when working in your studio. To write about privacy may sound like a contradiction, as the artist is involved in an activity that is about acute observation and it may feel anything but private to a model. What is meant is that your model should feel safe and secure at all times while they are modelling, before and after. It is important to provide a place for your model to change and prepare before the session. Don't assume that a model will happily undress in the studio; it is far more comfortable for them to have a place where they can privately undress and dress, as well as being able to store clothes and belongings.

It is important that no one can see into the studio from outside while a model is posing. Many years of teaching in adult education has thrown up weird and wonderful 'studio' settings, not all appropriate when working with a nude model. It is therefore important to make sure that any windows (and windows in doors, etc.) are covered. Where it isn't possible to use blinds, then white tissue or tracing paper is ideal, as this stops prying eyes but doesn't diminish the light.

Once a model is in position, particularly when in a long pose, odd draughts (or a howling gale as far as your model is concerned) become very noticeable, which the clothed artist who is moving around will be unaware of. Do make sure that you have enough heaters available, along with extension leads and enough power points.

If you are one of a group working from a model, if you are moving around the studio, avoid walking too close to the model. Often a model has commented that a draught is created if people walk too close to them once they are in the pose. Any air moving, particularly on a cold winter's day, can chill your model when it's hard enough to keep warm.

Ventilation

It is always important when using chemicals of any sort in the studio to make sure that the room is well ventilated to avoid the fumes of white spirit or turpentine building up too strongly. If the fumes become too potent it can make the experience for your model very unpleasant and I have known models become faint and nauseous if subjected to the odour of these chemicals for too long.

Do make sure that windows can be opened, even on a cold day, to freshen the air. During the summer when the temperature is (hopefully) warmer, or in the winter when the heating is on, turpentine and other thinners evaporate quickly into the air. This combination of fumes and heat are not the healthiest for all involved. Make sure that there are enough fan or other heaters around the model, to create a 'bubble' of warm air around them so then windows can be opened or ventilation turned on without any discomfort to your model.

Even if you are using one of the newer brands of more 'environmentally friendly' low-odour thinners now available, for example Zest-it™, then it is still wise to make sure that the room is well ventilated as the odour of such products may seem to be lower or more pleasant but in the long term aren't a huge improvement to the more traditional options!



Gloriana Seated.

Lighting

Ideally any studio windows would be north facing, giving the painter an even light throughout the entire painting session. Other directions are much more changeable from light to dark and particularly warm to cool variations although it's hard to control outside factors even when working in a north-facing studio. For example, once when I was working in a north-facing studio the light remained even for the first part of the sitting. Soon after, the light became much warmer as a result of a reflection coming from a building opposite. So be aware of the surroundings and their possible influences on light.

If your workspace has lighting that comes from other directions you may need to take measures to control the light if it becomes too bright, if it shines directly onto your model, or if shadows change during the time you are working.

Do spend time in the studio observing how the light changes, if the sun moves around the room and how areas of the studio will look at different times of the day. Some walls may have a good light that remains constant, while other areas within a room may be gloomier. Try to position your model and his/her chair or mattress in an area that is well lit but will remain as constant as possible for the duration of the sitting.

If the position of a particular window is a problem and there isn't a blind (and you don't want to eliminate all of the light), try putting a piece of white tissue over the window. This will diffuse and soften the directed light coming through, without reducing it too much.

Lamps and spotlights can be used to create a whole range of different moods and atmospheric effects. If you are planning to use artificial lights it is better to try and block out all daylight totally with heavy blinds (as was common practice in the studio of the painter Lucian Freud; daylight was totally eliminated from his studio and electric lighting used instead to give a constant light source on his model).

Dramatic lighting such as *contre-jour* or against the light, seen

beautifully in the paintings of Edgar Degas and Walter Sickert amongst others, this type of lighting in a painting can be used to great effect. This is when the model is placed between yourself and your light source, which throws the figure into shadow. This results in the tonal values of the painting being much more contrasting. More will be said on contre-jour and painting the nude during Chapter 4, 'Lighting and the Nude', when the work of notable artists will be discussed in greater depth.



Standing model.

Returning to the pose and marking the position of the model

When working on a more sustained pose you will need to find a way of marking the position of your model, whether he or she is standing, seated or reclining, so that after a break the pose can be returned to as closely as possible.

The easiest way to do this is to make a series of reference marks around the model using charcoal, chalk or masking tape. If it is a standing pose you may be able to mark no more than the position of the feet. When marking the position of a model in a seated position, don't forget to make some reference to the position of the chair legs as well as the main points of contact of where the model sits. Mark points such as where the arm touches the chair arm or the point where the shoulder touches. It is more difficult to return to a more complex reclining pose, as cushions, pillows and drapes can move subtly as the model leaves and returns to the pose. Once again, mark up the points where the important body structures are, the curve of the hip, the side of the torso, position of neck or head, and so on.

Mark the point at which the arm changes angle, inside the elbow and the same around the knee and ankle. Your model will know when the pose feels right or wrong as muscles will tense up if asked to do something which isn't comfortable. Do listen to your model and don't try and change the pose because a line on the drape suggests the pose is wrong. It is more likely that the drape will have moved slightly rather than your model being incorrect.

So often I see students trying to re-align the position of a model and trying to match the pose to a drawing that is either inaccurate or out of proportion. Never try to match your model's position to that of a bad drawing. Always listen to your model and respect their opinion; if they say the pose feels right for them then it probably is!

Remember to use vertical and horizontal lines to check the relationships and connections throughout the drawing as well as to check the position of the body. Also make sure that you have correctly documented the shape and proportion of negative shapes and spaces

around the body and set-up.

Once the position of your model has been established you will also need to register your own position in relation to the model. If you are standing to work, a couple of reference marks by your toes, or if you are seated marks around the front legs of your stool or chair will suffice. Don't mark the position of your easel and then assume that you are in the correct place. The easel may be in the same place but you could still be standing in a slightly different position.

Sometimes you may find that you are painting in a room when it wouldn't be appreciated to cover the floor with markings of any sort, either in chalk or tape. If you are in this position do look at other points within the room for reference if needed. You may notice that you line up with the edge of a radiator, picture frame or window. If the room has ceiling tiles or a lighting system you may be able to re-align yourself with a particular point or you may notice that you are standing on a joining of floorboards. All these can be used as references for where you are placed within a room. To remind yourself for a future sitting or class, draw a diagram in your sketchbook so that you can make sure you are in the same place next time.



Seated model.

Setting-up and distance from the model

Once the position of the model within the studio has been decided, take time to position yourself and your easel. Make sure that you have good light on your canvas, perhaps a window is behind you, or if you are working by artificial light, make sure that you have a light source positioned so that it gives you light but you don't get direct reflection on your canvas.

When working from the model do make sure that you aren't positioned too closely to the model or proportions may appear distorted. For example, if you have a seated model in front of you, and they are sitting very close to you it will seem that the lower part of the figure – thighs, knees or hands in lap – will be too large. Of course you may wish to exploit this and explore the distortions and exaggerations this can bring. The hands can be particularly expressive when the scale has been exaggerated a little.

In the painting overleaf it is possible to see how the close placing of the model exaggerates the scale of both her thighs and hands. This positioning was intentional as I was basing the composition on a triangle, with the lower half of the figure dramatically emphasizing this shape.

Exploring eye-level

Once the pose has been set do consider the height of your eye-level in relation to the model. Your eye-level can be found by looking directly ahead at a point on the wall. To establish this it may be helpful to place a small mark on the wall or other suitable surface at this height. It is important to be able to establish your eye-level and be aware of how this affects the way in which you view your subject. Moving away from the eye-level, both above and below, will result in foreshortening occurring.

When you view a sculpture high up on a pedestal you will see how

the proportions of the body are affected: the legs appear to be much larger in scale and as your eye runs up through the torso and head its proportions become more and more foreshortened. When viewing a sculpture in this position your eye-level is low, but if you were to stand on a platform and look down upon a standing figure you would have a high eye-level.

It is interesting to see how when sculpting his giant figure of *David*, Michelangelo knew exactly how the proportions of the figure would be affected when being viewed from down below, and he purposely over-exaggerated the scale of the top half of the figure. When viewed from directly in front as photographed in many art library tomes you can see how the chest, head, hands and length of arms do appear to be exaggerated.

When looking at sculptures high up on medieval churches and cathedrals often the head appears to be distorted and sticks out when viewed from the same height as the sculpture. This was done because the sculptor knew that when seen from ground level the head would otherwise not be visible; without this exaggeration the full figure wouldn't be seen. Artists were very aware of how the artwork would be seen and how it would be finally positioned and so would distort figures when they were placed high so as to be convincing to viewers.

Lucian Freud's painting of *Leigh Bowery* seen standing on a tabletop gives a very dramatic composition; we view the standing figure as we would a sculpture high on a plinth. Our eye-level is low, placed at the model's knee height so that we appear to look up at the rest of the figure. The upper torso and the head appear much smaller in scale, further adding to the monumentality of the painting.

When we look at Freud's reclining nudes we see how a high eye-level has been used to great effect. The artist is using a high viewpoint, which is accentuated by his position close to his model. Looking down on the figure in this way increases any foreshortening. This can be seen in the paintings *Naked Girl* (1966), *Night Portrait* (1977–78) and

Naked Man on a Bed (1989–90).

Once you have decided on your eye-level for the painting, do consider how much, or how little space you want around the figure in the composition. Sometimes the figure will completely fill the pictorial space, while at other times the scale of the figure may be much smaller so there is more emphasis on the space around them.

When looking at the drawings and paintings of Alberto Giacometti we see how the figure is often small-scale within the space it occupies. The studio furniture and the studio itself have an important a focus as the figure. The lines of paint delineate the objects, the easel, sculptures and other studio furniture with as much importance as the seated figure in the centre. *Figure Study* (1953) and *The Artist's Mother* (1950) both show how the figure has been depicted with the same intense observation as the canvases leaning up against the studio walls, sculpture and studio detritus of all kinds.

Selecting the composition

Using a viewfinder can be a quick and helpful way of deciding how much or how little space you would like around your figure. Quickly and easily moving the viewfinder near to you and further away can enable you to see how the figure is placed within the composition and how this appears within the rectangle. As the hand moves backwards and forwards, it is possible to see how much space is needed around the subject.

It is possible to buy such a viewfinder in an art shop; often the central rectangle will be made of a clear plastic that has a grid on it, which can be very useful as this gives a number of horizontals and verticals that you can use. Alternatively you can make your own out of card, of various sizes and proportions, rectangular and square.

Other useful materials to collect

If you are planning to work with a model on a regular basis it would be helpful to collect props and various other bits and pieces that could be useful when setting up a new painting. It can become quite dull if you have to paint the figure in the same chair, or against the same colour drape each time so try to extend the range of colours of drapes and different fabrics. A number of cushions and pillows are useful to support a pose, as are small pieces of foam which can be used if there are any pressure points that begin to hurt once the pose has been set.

A variety of stools, chairs, a mattress or other supportive surfaces that can be used for reclining poses are all useful to have to hand.

Materials

Oil paints

Oil paints can be bought as either student or artist quality. If you are starting out or haven't used oils very much it is better to buy student quality paints. Each paint manufacturer makes their colours both as student and artist series. Student quality paints will be similarly priced as they tend to have less pigment and more fillers such as linseed oil so the resulting colour won't be as saturated as the colours found in artist quality paints.

Artist quality colours are found in series, from 1 to 6 depending on the make. Cheaper pigments such as those used for the earth colours are series 1 while the more expensive pigments such as cadmium and cobalt colours are found in higher series numbers. These paints are more expensive because either the pigment is expensive or the process of making the pigment is time-consuming (such as that to make rose

madder).



Oil colours.

Palette

Palettes can be found in all shapes and sizes, from rectangular to the more traditional kidney shaped. Most palettes you will find in art shops are made of either white plastic or wood.



The palette.

The wooden palette is a beautiful surface to work on and is the traditional surface on which to use oil colours. The natural mid-dark tone of the wood is particularly helpful to us when mixing colours and to be able to gauge the correct tone. Wooden palettes were traditionally made with mahogany, but most of the ones available from art suppliers today will be made from plywood that has been stained and varnished to imitate the older style palettes.

Sometimes palettes are sold which are made of untreated wood and these have not been varnished. Before you begin to use the palette, the surface will need to be prepared or sealed which will prevent any of the oil mixes being too readily absorbed into the wooden surface. If the

wood is left untreated you will find that the paint will disappear and any that remains on the surface will dry out quickly. It is possible to make your own palette if you have a suitable piece of wood and a template. You will need to prepare the wooden surface in the same way.

To prepare and seal the palette you will need a bottle of linseed oil and a cloth. Begin by pouring a small amount of oil onto the surface. With circular movements carefully rub the oil into the wood with the cloth. Once the wood has been covered let any remaining oil soak into the surface. Add a small amount of oil at a time and work this into both the front and back of the palette. Keep doing this a few times until all the oil has been absorbed and the palette stops absorbing any more. Once the oil stops soaking in, wipe off any excess oil and allow the palette to dry before you begin to use it.

White palettes are a popular alternative to wood. They come in a variety of sizes and are more portable than a wooden version. The white surface, however, can be troublesome when colour mixing and judging tonal values.

One of the biggest problems I have seen when students mix on a white surface is that the tonal range of the colour mixes appears to be too light once added onto the painting. This is because when you mix on a white surface even the palest of colours will appear to be darker than they really are because they are surrounded by white. Colour will appear to be purer when seen against white but do be careful that each tone is correct. Mixing on a mid-tone surface such as wood can help you to judge the tones more clearly, particularly once the white surface of the canvas has been obliterated and covered with layers of paint.

Disposable palettes are useful if you are working in a class or you are travelling with your materials, as there is no clearing-up to do. Once you have finished work you simply tear off the top sheet and dispose of it.

Mixing with a palette knife

It is possible to mix all your colours with a brush, but mixing with a palette knife will result in brighter and cleaner colours. If you mix with a knife, it does enable you to mix more paint at a time and when adding a colour into a mix, a knife will allow you to mix more thoroughly than with a brush. When using a brush for mixing, colour can be pushed far down into the bristles and if the brush isn't wiped or cleaned well enough between mixing, the remnants of any colour can be dragged into a new mix resulting in muddying and de-saturating the colour.



Mixing with a palette knife.

There are many different shapes and sizes of palette knife blades. The best shape for mixing on the palette is one with a long, tapered blade of around 10cm. Palette knives with a shorter diamond-shaped blade are not suitable for mixing and are intended for applying paint directly onto a canvas if this is your preferred way of applying paint.

Using a knife to mix will allow you to control the consistency of paint much better, slowly adding small amounts of thinners or oil at a time, rather than over-diluting with a brush (brushes can act like sponges and absorb too much liquid, which results in paint becoming too fluid and dilute). A knife will also enable you to control the amount of pigment you add to a mix at any given time.

Judging tonal values

Once an amount of colour has been mixed and you want to check its tonal value before placing any onto the painting, hold up your palette knife with some of the mix on it against the colour on the area of the figure that you have been mixing. You will be able to see quickly whether the tone or colour temperature is correct, or if any further mixing is required.

Another helpful tip to double-check the tone when mixing is to place a small amount of mixed colour on the edge of a piece of paper. Then hold this out towards the model, or part of the composition you are working on. As you do this, half close your eyes. If the colour that is placed on the edge of the paper 'blends' into the subject, and there is no distinction between the two then you have established the correct tone.

When mixing with a knife, do try to use both sides of the knife as

you work; turn the blade over frequently when mixing to make sure that all pigment is being thoroughly mixed together. Do make sure that each mix, or pool of colour is clean and bright with no streaks of pigment remaining. To ensure that all pigments are well mixed, try to spend time when mixing – it isn't something that can be rushed. If your colours appear to be muddy or 'chalky' when applied to the canvas, examine how your colours appear on the palette. Make sure that there is no trace of white or any other colours that have been added around the edges of your mix.

Continue to use your palette knife during the entire mixing process. As you need to add more thinners or medium into your mix, you will just need to touch the surface of the liquid with the tip of the blade. This will pick up a small amount, but enough to add to a mix little by little. This allows you to control the consistency of the paint, rather than adding too much in one go and making your paint dilute and transparent.

In the same way, add small amounts of pigment at a time when mixing a colour so that you control the changing colour more successfully. Adding too much of one colour all at once will change the mix too rapidly. This will then require any other colours you have already used to be added to return to where you started. A small amount added at a time, although slower to do, will allow you to observe how the colour changes before you add more.

Brushes

The brush we choose to use is very personal to each of us. As well as selecting from the vast number of different brush shapes, textures and sizes that are available, there are many other influences affecting the sort of brushstroke that we can make. Factors such as the surface we are painting on, such as a smooth, glass-like gesso panel or a heavy-

weight textured canvas, may influence the type of paintbrush we choose to use.

You may select a fine round sable brush to use when painting on a gesso panel whereas a large square hog bristle may be more appropriate for working on a heavy, coarse-grained canvas. It may take some time to find your preferred choice of brush but continue to search until you find the type of brush that works best for your practice.

Brushes do vary enormously in quality. It is worth investing in good quality brushes, as there’s nothing worse than a brush that doesn’t hold its shape well or begins to shed bristles on your painting during its first use. Very cheap brushes are definitely a false economy. Good quality brushes do keep their shape better, and for longer, so with good care your brushes will last a long time.



A selection of brushes.

Brush shape

There are many brushes suitable for oil painting and most are commonly found as round, flat or filbert shaped bristles. Each make of brush offers a wide range of brush shape and size.

Round brushes are a favourite brush shape for many artists. Rounds range from a very small 00 up to a 20 and can be either pointed or have a flatter dome shape. Depending on size, round brushes can be used throughout the entire painting process from the first drawing and placing of the composition, to blocking-in, layering the paint, and adding the final details.

Rigger brushes are a fine, long and round bristle shape; they have a much longer bristle than a round brush. These are very useful brushes for when you are drawing with paint; they produce a finely drawn line with great fluency and precision.

Flat bristle brushes have a square headed shape and a larger brush is excellent for blocking-in large areas. Its chisel shape allows the painter to achieve a precisely placed stroke and the marks can appear quite blocky with a sharp edge. These square strokes can be seen clearly in Cézanne's still life and landscape paintings, building up block-by-block and changing direction to describe form and volume.

Filbert brushes have a flat bristle but rather than being square they have a tapered shape bristle. They give a less angular mark compared to the chiselled flat shaped brush.

Bristle type

Brushes suitable for use with oil paint can be made from either natural fibre, most commonly red or kolinsky sable, chunking and hog hair bristle. There are many synthetic and nylon brushes available.

Both sable and synthetic bristle types are soft and responsive in touch and they hold paint well. They are useful for everything from the initial drawing of the composition onto the surface to the detailed final touches at the end of the painting.

Brush care

With care your brushes can last a long time. When you have finished work remove as much paint as possible from the bristle by wiping with a rag. Then use white spirit or other solvent to rinse the brush so that as much of the paint residue as possible has been removed. With a small amount of soap in the palm of your hand you can work the soap deep into the bristles with a circular movement. Then thoroughly rinse the brush in warm water and allow to dry. Don't leave the paintbrush soaking in the white spirit overnight. This will ruin the shape of the brush and will ruin the bristle.

If brushes do lose their shape it is possible to revive them by working a small amount of petroleum jelly into the bristle and gently re-shaping the hairs before storing. Before the brush is used again, do remember to wash the bristle again to remove it.

Thinners, oils and mediums

When using oil paints, inevitably you will need to use thinners and mediums of some sort during the painting process. The various brands and numerous bottles we find in art shops and online suppliers can make the selection of what is the best for what purpose quite difficult.

When you begin to use oil paints it can be hard to know which particular bottle will be the best, and at what stage we should use thinners and mediums in our paint mixes.

The most commonly used thinners and mediums are discussed below: what they are used for and how they differ from other similar products.

Thinners

Thinners, also known as solvents and dilutants, are used during the earlier stages of a painting. Turpentine, white spirit, Sansodor™, and Zest-it™ are the most commonly found types of thinners. Thinners do just that: they dilute and thin oil paint and are used for cleaning brushes and equipment.



Thinners and mediums used for oil painting.

When using any type of solvent, do make sure that you have good ventilation; care must be taken when handling them. Before starting work, use a barrier cream and if you need to transfer solvents from one container to another you should wear protective gloves. When you are not using turpentine or other thinners during the time you are painting, get into the habit of covering all jars and dipper pots with a lid so that spillages can be avoided and fumes don't build up as the liquid evaporates.

Sansodor™ is a low odour solvent and it is useful for artists who wish to avoid exposure to turpentine fumes. It is used like turpentine

for thinning paint and for cleaning brushes and it evaporates slowly. It is recommended for use when working in a class situation when many students are using solvents at the same time, to avoid the build-up of fumes during a session.

Artists have used turpentine for centuries and today it is widely used in oil painting. It is used for thinning paints as well as being an essential ingredient in both oil painting mediums and varnishes. It has a distinctive and unmistakable sweet smell, as it is distilled from pine. When storing turpentine make sure that it is kept away from direct sunlight as this will make it thicken and eventually discolour. It is best to keep it in closed glass jars and ideally in a metal container for safety.

Turpentine is used to thin paint so it is ideal when working during the early stages of a painting, when sketching or drawing with paint, or when blocking-in the first patches of tone and colour. It is important that paint is not over-diluted; this is seen when the paint breaks up into tiny rivulets on the canvas surface. Also make sure that you don't use diluted colour over a thicker layer of paint, as different drying times can make the topmost surface crack as the paint underneath takes longer to dry.

White spirit is excellent for cleaning both brushes and palette. If you are using this when painting do buy artist-quality white spirit found in any art suppliers. This is the cheapest solvent you can buy and it is a petroleum solvent that is distilled from coal. Do not use the DIY brands of white spirit as these have a very pungent odour and are not good for use in an enclosed space.

Zest-it™ is widely becoming more accepted as an alternative to white spirit and turpentine. Many art schools and colleges now insist on it being used instead of other solvents. It is nonflammable but it does have a strong citrus odour which can be quite over-powering; if this is a problem, Sansodor™ may be a preferred low-odour alternative. Use Zest-it™ exactly as you would use other solvents to dilute paint and to clean brushes and palette. It can be mixed with all oil paint

mediums and it has a slower drying time than turpentine.

When working with solvents, make sure that you dispose of any you have finished with safely. NEVER pour anything down the sink or into the drains. This is very dangerous to the environment and is illegal, as well as risking a blocked sink.

Solvents can be used more than once, however murky your thinners may appear. When you have finished work at the end of the session, put the lid back on the jar and leave the liquid to settle. The paint residue will sink to the bottom of the jar so that when you return you will find that the thinners will appear to be clear. Very carefully decant the clear solvents into a new jar so that the paint residue remains in the bottom of the jar. The jar can then be wiped with tissue and thrown away, or if the residue is left until it dries out and becomes powdery it can then be thrown away safely.

Alternatively, many colleges and other educational establishments will have containers in which you can pour used solvents and these are then disposed of safely.

Oils and mediums for oil painting

When students first begin to use oil paints they quite often say that they are put off by the sheer number of bottles of mediums, oils and thinners on offer and not knowing which is the best to use and when. There is a wide choice of mediums and oils suitable for oil painting and in the following section the most common ones are highlighted along with their uses and particular characteristics. These oils are vegetable oils and they are used to make oil paint. Linseed, poppy and safflower oils all modify gloss, paint consistency and drying times, some quickening the speed while others lengthen drying time.

When adding thinners into oil paints, the colour saturation is diluted and this can result in the paint surface looking dull and matt.

The addition of an oil or medium will retain colour saturation, sheen and depth of tone as it dries, as well as increasing paint flow. Oils and mediums can be used in opaque mixes as well as for glazing.

Some brands of oil paint contain more oil than others. To stop some areas appearing too dull or matt it is advisable to use a small amount of medium throughout the painting process. Once the canvas has been covered with one or more layers of paint, slowly reduce the amount of thinners you add to the paint, and increase the amount of medium or oil. This will ensure that each layer of paint will be slightly thicker than the previous layer and this will also allow the thinner layers below to dry and so avoid any cracking of the topmost layer of paint.

All mediums will give the oil paint a more glossy appearance when it is dry. If you like a high-gloss finish use a greater proportion of oil in the later stages of the painting but be careful not to add too much oil into the paint mix as this will make the paint feel too slippery and the pigment will separate in the oil.

Linseed oil is the most commonly used oil and it comes in many forms. Cold-pressed linseed oil is self-levelling so brushstrokes are reduced as it dries, so this is ideal to use if you prefer a smoother finish. Refined linseed oil is one of the most popular oils. When mixed with oil paint it reduces consistency a little so that brushstrokes remain and the surface can be more textured and it prolongs drying time.

Stand oil is a thickened form of linseed oil, which tends not to yellow as much as other oils such as cold-pressed linseed oil and refined linseed oil can do (this is because the manufacturing process thickens the linseed oil by heating it in a vacuum). This makes it the preferred medium of many painters. Linseed stand oil dries to a smooth enamel-like finish with no visible brushwork, making it ideal for glazing and fine detail; it also slows drying time.

Poppy oil is a pale oil made from poppy seeds. It increases gloss and transparency and it also resists yellowing as it dries. It does dry more quickly than linseed and it is excellent for glazing.

Safflower oil has the same properties as poppy oil but it is a much slower drying oil when mixed into oil colour.

Liquin™ is a semi-gloss medium which, when mixed with oil paint, helps to speed up the drying process while also resisting any yellowing of colour mixes as the paint dries. Liquin can be bought as Liquin Original, which can halve the usual drying time. The surface can be touch dry in 1–6 days depending on the colour and thickness of the paint being applied. This quickening of drying time makes Liquin a popular medium with many painters. The paint stroke will flatten out as the mix with this medium dries, resulting in a smooth, glossy finish. Liquin is particularly useful if you work with glazes, as the drying time allows work to progress more quickly, allowing each colour to shine through to the final layer of paint.

If you want the paint strokes to be visible once the painting has dried, it is possible to buy Liquin as an impasto gel which, when mixed with paint, will retain textures without any levelling. Liquin Fine Detail medium is a glossy medium and is ideal for finer details, blending and glazing colour as it dries to a smooth finish.

Varnishes

Once a painting has been completed you will need to decide whether or not you wish to varnish it. Sometimes it can be difficult to decide if this needs to be done and many artists prefer not to varnish and to leave the surface as it is. Sometimes the surface of a painting may appear to be quite patchy as each colour dries differently. Some will dry more quickly than others and some mixes may contain more oil and so appear glossy in appearance when compared with other colours.

With careful varnishing the surface of a painting can become more unified, with these patches being brought together so that no one

patch stands out or is more shiny than any other. The resulting colours will appear brighter and richer after varnishing.

Varnishes can be bought as both matt and glossy finish. Which you choose to use will depend on your preferred finish. If you are unsure of your preference you could use an older painting or study to try them out. When you have selected a varnish, always test a small area first to check that the colour doesn't move at all. It is essential that the painting is completely dry before varnishing. Wait as long as possible, preferably a year or more if you can.

Retouching varnish offers an alternative to other more glossy varnishes. It can be diluted with a small amount of turpentine which then doesn't result in a high gloss finish as many other varnishes give. This type of varnish may be used during the painting process, as long as the paint surface is dry enough of course, and it can also be used as a temporary varnish to protect the surface of paintings as they go off to an exhibition.



Surfaces used for oil painting.

If you are continuing to work on a painting after a long break, retouching varnish is helpful to lift any colour which has sunk and appears dull, but it can also be used to help new paint adhere to older paint.

Oiling-out

Some artists prefer not to use any type of varnish on their finished paintings. Instead they use a process called 'oiling-out'. This technique is helpful in evening out the surface tone across a

painting if some areas have sunk and others remain glossy. It replenishes the linseed oil in the paint surface so appears to 'lift' the colour, particularly in areas where the paint looks dull.

This method does give a little more sheen to a dry surface, but much less than using a glossy varnish. Before you do this, note that the paint needs to be as dry as it would be for varnishing.

You will need to mix a solution of 50/50 turpentine and linseed oil. Very carefully with a lint-free cloth (this avoids any stray strands sticking onto the surface of your painting) you will rub a little of the mixture into the paint surface, a small amount at a time. All the time check to see if there is any colour on the cloth. If this happens, stop; the paint isn't dry enough. Work your way over the entire surface using a gentle circular motion until you have an equal amount over the surface. Wipe any excess mixture off. Leave the painting away from dust, and on a flat surface to dry thoroughly.

Painting surfaces and supports

There is a wide selection of prepared surfaces to choose from that are suitable for oils. From prepared canvases and linen to canvas boards and gesso panels, each surface will respond quite differently as paint is applied. Canvases provide a flexible surface while a canvas board or wooden panel will be rigid. Some artists prefer a smooth surface, while others choose to work on a rougher, coarse-grain canvas. As with many of the other tools we use with oils such as brushes, thinners and mediums, experiment with different surfaces until you find ones that work well for you.

Canvases

It is possible to buy a wide range of stretched canvases, both cotton duck and linen. These can be found reasonably priced either in shops or by ordering online. It is worth buying different surfaces to begin with to see which you prefer and which best suit your practice.

The term ‘canvas’ indicates a flexible painting support, which is stretched over a wooden frame. The most commonly found surfaces are cotton duck, but it can also be a fabric made of other natural fibres such as linen or flax.

The majority of stretched canvases you will find will have already been prepared with one or more coats of primer. This is most commonly acrylic gesso, recognized by a brilliant white surface. If you find boards or canvases that retain their natural linen tone then these will have been prepared with rabbit-skin glue, which remains transparent when applied to the surface. Prepared surfaces allow you to paint onto the surface straight away with no further preparation necessary.

Better quality linen canvases are often prepared with an oil-based primer and this isn’t as absorbent as a gesso primer. Any packaging should clearly state how the surface has been prepared but if in doubt ask someone in the shop.

Most linen is woven in Belgium and it has been used as a support for oil painting for many centuries. Linen canvases are considered to be superior in quality to cotton duck canvases. Linen fibres are closely woven and they are less likely to shrink once primed, and as a surface it is thought to be stronger, more durable and stable. Linen can be bought in different textures: coarse, medium and fine quality. Fine is also referred to as ‘portrait’ quality as it is suitable for more detailed work and a smoother finish.

The majority of shop-bought prepared and stretched canvases will be cotton duck. The quality of cotton duck will vary and depends on

the weight and closeness of weave. If the fabric is more closely woven and is of a heavier weight, it will be a better quality and so more satisfactory to work on. If the cotton duck is un-primed it will shrink slightly when it is primed – more so if it is of a looser weave or a lighter weight.

If you prefer a more rigid support try either a wooden or canvas board. There are many different types to choose from. If you are working on a smaller scale, or are painting while travelling, boards can be easy to transport. Canvas boards are bought readily prepared and they are ready to work on straight away. Like canvases they are primed with white acrylic gesso, or rabbit skin glue which retains the natural linen appearance. Sometimes prepared surfaces such as these may feel too absorbent, as the paint layer sinks too rapidly into the surface. If this is a problem for you then you can always add extra layers of primer over the top, making sure that you add acrylic over acrylic, or rabbit skin glue over rabbit skin glue. Add as many layers as you need until the surface holds the paint well.

If you like a very smooth surface to work on try a gesso panel. This is a beautiful surface and is as smooth as glass. In between each layer of gesso, the surface is carefully sanded down before the next layer is added. The first application of oil paint will be readily absorbed but this lessens as the paint surface builds up. Gesso panels are particularly good if your work has a highly detailed finish.

It is possible to work on all sorts of surfaces, and many that are made and prepared at home can make a very satisfactory surface to work on. Bits of plywood, old pieces of card, mount board and heavy weight papers are all good to try. You will need to prepare the surface with two or three coats of acrylic primer, which has been applied evenly. Let each coat dry thoroughly before proceeding with the next. It is always useful to have with you a number of prepared small boards so if you wish to try a second painting, or a quick study, you can do so without being precious about a more expensive bought surface.

Stretching your own canvas

It is useful to know how to be able to stretch a canvas of your own as sometimes the sizes and proportions of ready-made stretched canvases we find in shops can be limited, especially if you wish to work on a more unusual proportion or shape. The skills to be able to stretch your own will give you a much greater freedom when selecting the scale, proportion and surface for your canvas.

If you have found a type of canvas or linen you particularly like or wish to work on a much larger scale then it is useful to be able to make up a canvas yourself, and although many canvas suppliers will be able to stretch a canvas for you if you prefer for an additional fee, it is much cheaper to do this for yourself. Buying canvas or linen on a roll and having a supply of stretcher bars of varying lengths in the studio will enable you to prepare a canvas of any size or proportion as you need.

Equipment needed for making your own stretched canvases

To stretch your own canvas you will need:

A cut piece of canvas
Four stretcher bars
Hammer
Tape measure
Canvas pliers
Staple-gun
Wood wedges

A list of art suppliers can be found in the index.



Equipment needed for stretching your own canvas.

It is advisable to cover the table you will be working on with either a cloth or newspaper before laying out your equipment and beginning work. If you are using newspaper do make sure that any staples are removed so that the canvas (if it is already primed) isn't damaged. If you are stretching pre-primed canvas it is particularly important to protect the surface so that nothing can dirty or scratch the primed canvas; if it is damaged this can lead to problems later once paint has sunk into the fabric.

Step 1: Assembling the stretcher bars

Once the size of your canvas has been decided upon, you will need to assemble stretcher bars of the required lengths. Wooden stretcher bars are usually made from seasoned pine, or other woods that are fairly resistant to warping. Stretcher bars can vary greatly in quality; make sure that any bars you buy are warp-free. You will find that the front edge of a stretcher bar will be raised and this is the side that will face the canvas. It is intended to keep the canvas from touching the inner edge once it has been stretched. If this edge is too close to the canvas as you paint you may find that a line or edge can appear on the front of the material, as pressure when applying paint will result in this edge being imprinted onto the front surface.



Slotting together two stretcher bars.

Stretcher bars come with mitred corners so that they can be easily slotted together. The joints can be knocked together using a hammer

(preferably one with a softer head, either rubber or wooden) to make your square or rectangle. It is over this frame that you will be stretching your piece of canvas. If your frame is longer than 90cm in either direction it is wise to use a crossbar in the centre that will help to maintain the canvas shape over time.

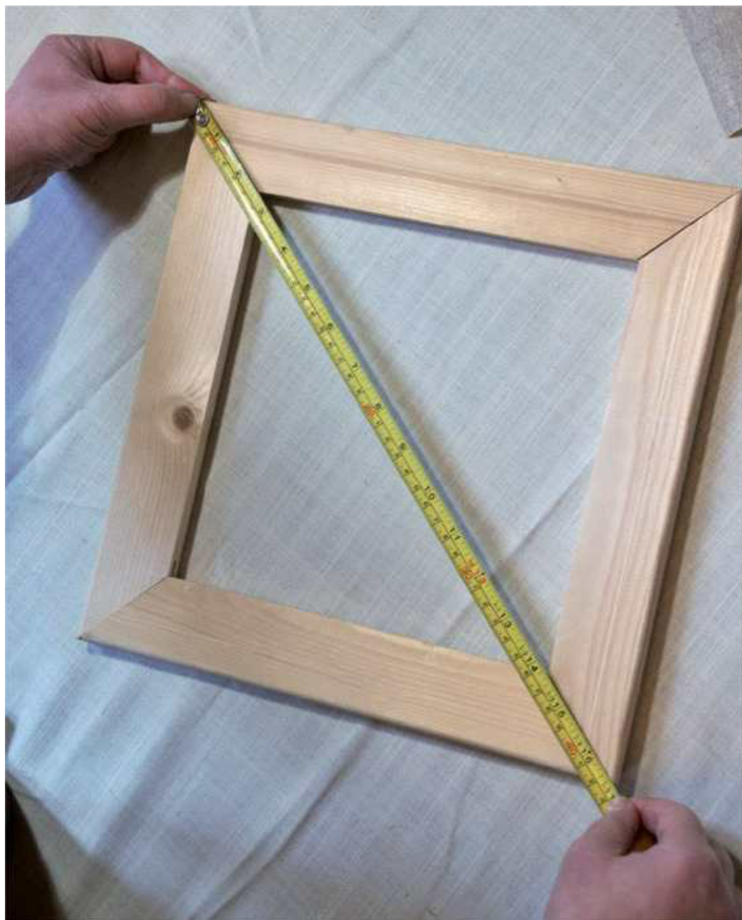
Put the wooden wedges that are supplied with shop bought canvases to one side for later, as these will be inserted into the corners once the canvas has been fully attached to tighten the fabric if needed.



Assembling the stretcher bars.

Step 2: Checking your assembled frame

To double-check that your assembled frame is 'square' measure the diagonals from corner to corner. Then do this in the opposite direction. Both diagonals should be of an equal length; if not, try to re-assemble the pieces and then check again.



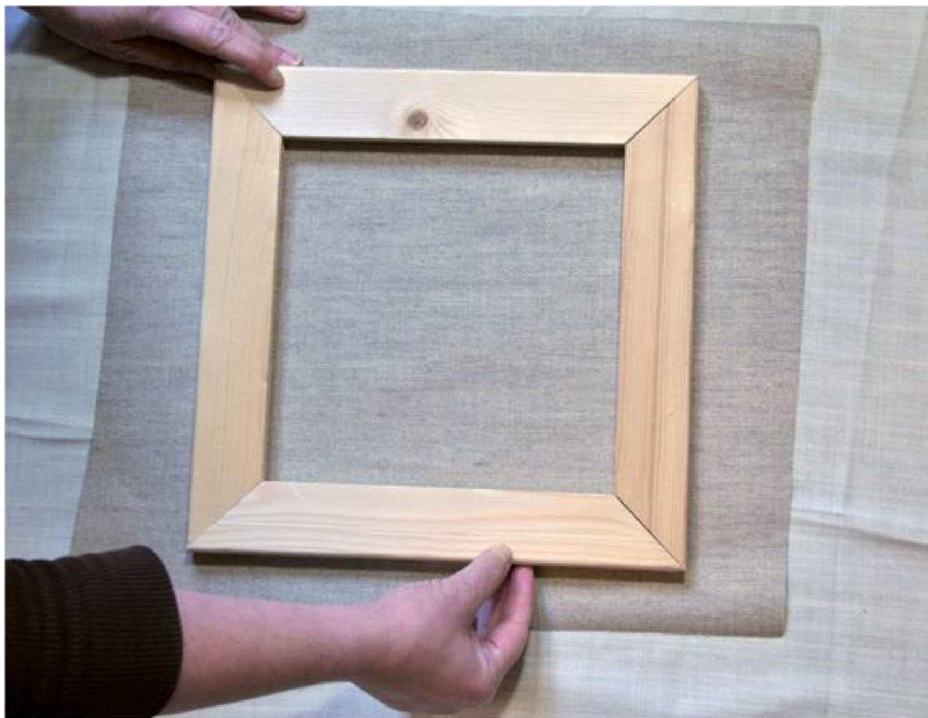
Measuring across from corner to corner.

Step 3: Preparing your canvas

Make sure that your piece of canvas is at least 5cm bigger than the outer edge of the frame. Until you become more practised at stretching canvases I would recommend that you have more than this.

Once you are ready, with the canvas cut to shape and the frame assembled, lay the piece of canvas on the table. If it is pre-primed make sure that the primed side is facing downwards. Then lay your stretcher over the top. Remember that the side with the raised edge also faces down on the back of your piece of canvas. Make sure that you have at least 5cm of material spare on either side of the rectangle, as this will make the process of stretching the canvas easier.

One final thing you need to check before you begin attaching your piece of canvas: examine how the weave of the material runs horizontally and vertically, so carefully line up the edges of your frame with the horizontals and verticals of the weave. This results in everything being square; there's nothing worse than rushing a canvas to find that, once you have finished, the threads run diagonally when compared to the frame.



Make sure that you leave enough canvas free around the stretcher.

Step 4: Attaching the canvas

Make sure that all the canvas is protected by cloth on the table (or floor if the canvas is very large) and then begin to attach the fabric. The easiest tool to use for this is a staple gun, although you can also use tacks to do this. As you begin to stretch the canvas make sure that you are using enough pressure.

Stretching a piece of un-primed canvas is much easier than primed. But, you will need to be careful that you don't overstretch the fabric and create too much tension across the canvas surface. You will get a feel for the process. When stretching a primed piece of linen you will seem to need to use more pressure, but it is important not to over-pull or you may risk cracking the primer by putting it under too much stress.

Using the staple gun you will begin to attach the canvas in the centre of each side of the frame. Work in opposite directions each time: attach the canvas at the top in the centre, then at the bottom. Then rotate around 90 degrees and do the same. Pull the canvas towards you using the canvas pliers, using equal pressure each time and carefully pulling the canvas around the back of the stretcher, then secure with a staple.



Attaching the canvas in the centre of the bar.

Once you have placed a staple in the centre of each side, then you need to pull the fabric gently and fasten down loose fabric in the corners, this will make sure that you don’t over-pull the fabric as you are stretching it. Place a staple just to one edge Further attachments. before the joint.



Fastening down the corners.

The next step is to work from the centre point out to the corners, attaching with staples as you progress. Gently pull the fabric, slightly away from the centre, securing the halfway points along each edge as you go.

Continue to fasten down from the halfway points to the corner

along each edge of the frame until the canvas has been secured all the way around. Staples don't need to be too close together, a 4–5cm gap will be absolutely fine.



Further attachments.

Step 5: Securing the corners

The final step is securing the corners. Fold over the corner flaps and carefully fasten them down. To begin with this can be quite tricky, but don't despair: keep practising because it will become easier the more you do.

Once the stretching process is complete, check the tension of the canvas. The surface should be taut, rather like a drum-skin. If it is slightly floppy you will need to place the wedges into each of the joints. If you stretched un-primed canvas, it is wise to prime the surface first before putting in the wedges, as priming will tighten the surface.



Preparing the corner fabric.



Fastening down the corner.

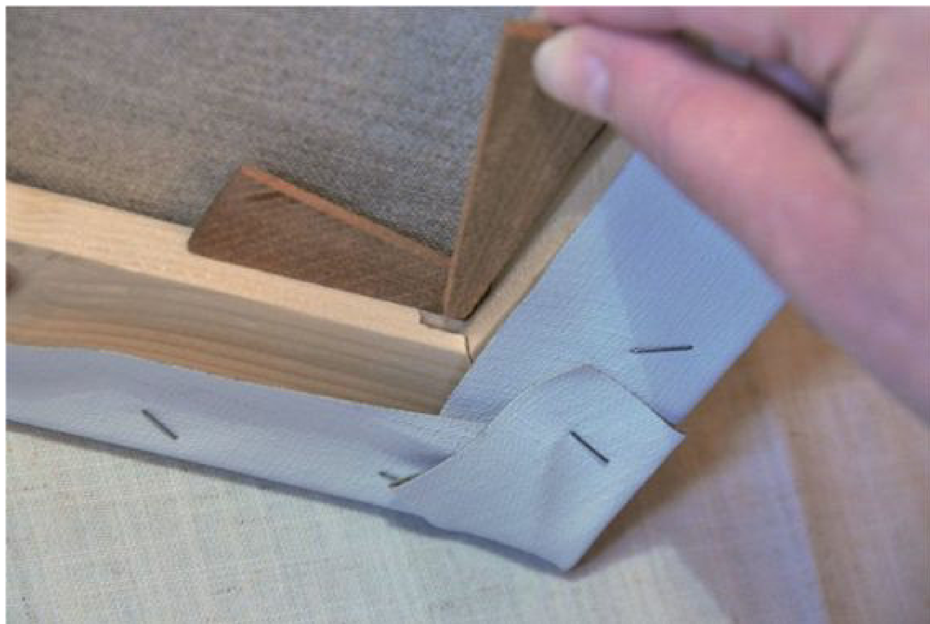


A stretched canvas.

Step 6: Putting in wedges (if needed)

With a small hammer, very gently tap in a wedge, one into each corner

with a similar amount of pressure – don't hit them in too hard. There will be two wedges in each corner, but put a wedge into each corner in one direction before putting in the second wedge, in the same manner. This will tighten the fabric a little more.



Putting in the corner wedges.

Even after putting in the wedges, temperature and humidity changes can affect the tension of the canvas. If you find the surface has become somewhat floppy while you are working on your painting, a useful trick is to brush warm water onto the back of the canvas. This will not upset the primer or paint surface. Take a large brush and brush a small amount of warm water over the back. This will tighten up the surface once again.

Once you have stretched your canvas, you will need to choose which primer to use. Most artists would use an acrylic gesso primer, which gives a white surface, or rabbit skin glue (size), which allows the natural tone of the linen to remain. It is important that the canvas is prepared and that the surface is primed before painting commences. Priming will seal the surface of the canvas so that paint isn't absorbed into the surface, in the very long-term potentially rotting or damaging the support.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING COLOUR

Introduction

When looking at paintings in the flesh, it is fascinating to be able to analyse and examine up close how colour has been used. Seeing how paint has been laid down on the canvas, by layering, scumbling, and glazing one colour over another can show us a great deal about an artist's working procedure. During this chapter you will mix a number of limited palettes and examine how colour temperature is important in painting. Colour relationships, of how one colour will influence another, use of complementary colour and colour mixing will be explored through a number of exercises and studies made from the figure.



Lucy.

Mixing with a limited palette

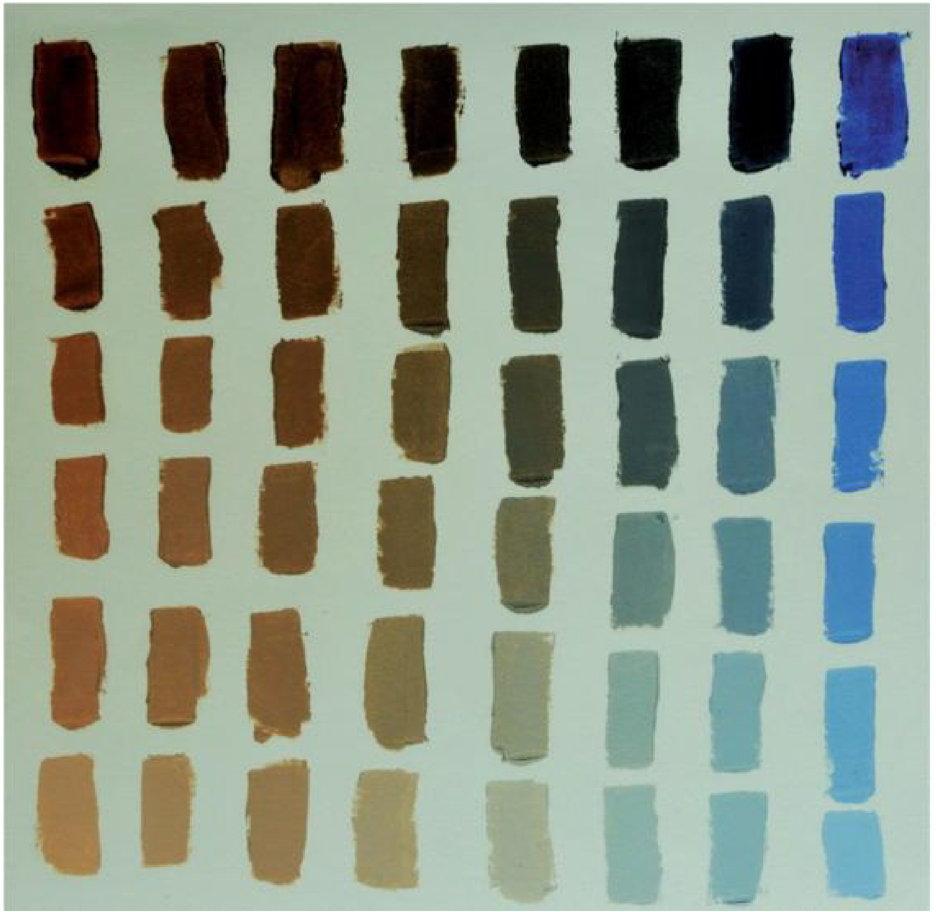
When you first begin to use oil paints you may find it helpful to limit the number of colours you have on your palette while you become more familiar with each colour's various properties and characteristics. Reducing the number of colours you are working with will encourage you to explore all the possibilities within each palette's tone and temperature range. It can be surprising when we use a limited palette how great a range of mixes can be achieved with careful mixing. Working from dark to light, and by changing the tone with white it is possible to achieve a wide range of tones, both warm and cool, resulting in a harmonious and subtle palette suitable for use when painting the figure.

Each of the following mixing exercises will focus on a particular limited palette and the wide range of mixes that can be achieved by careful and patient mixing will be demonstrated with a series of colour swatches. Painted studies from the figure will then show the individual nature of each palette with its subtle hues and temperature ranges that are particularly useful when painting flesh.

Colour mixing exercise: burnt sienna, ultramarine and titanium white

This limited palette gives a very satisfying range of colour mixes suitable for painting skin tones, giving beautiful greys, warm and cool. This palette is particularly good to use when you are painting the figure in natural light.

Take a sheet of paper; as you will be using oil paint on it, make sure that it is fairly heavyweight. Don't worry about priming or preparing the surface, as these are exploratory exercises that can be fixed into a sketchbook; alternatively you could use up old scraps of canvas or board.



A sheet of colour swatches mixed with white, burnt sienna and ultramarine.

You will begin to mix a range of tones with varying proportions of burnt sienna and ultramarine. You will not use any white at this stage. It is only when the top row of mixes have been prepared that you will

then begin to add white to create the lighter tones on the palette.

The top row (see above) shows eight swatches of colour. The left colour swatch is pure burnt sienna, while on the right is ultramarine blue. The six colours in between consist of a mixture of both colours together, with varying proportions of each. Moving from left to right a small amount of ultramarine is added to burnt sienna. Each following mix is the result of more ultramarine being added. This continues as with each swatch the amount of ultramarine is slowly increased within the mix so that the colour becomes darker in tone and moves towards the blue. The final patch of colour on the right-hand side shows ultramarine in its pure form, the amount of burnt sienna has been so reduced that it doesn't change and influence the blue colour at all.

As you are beginning to mix, do make sure that you are mixing enough of each colour. A generous amount of paint will need to be mixed during these earliest stages so that there will be enough to allow for some of each mix to be used as the basis of the following mix. If you mix too little in the early stages you will soon run out of paint and then will need to re-mix while trying to match up using the correct proportions of each pigment. Remember that you will be making a number of mixes in between the start and end colours and also shades of each colour in the rows underneath.

As you mix try to keep each of the colour mixes in order on the palette, so that your palette resembles the rows of colour swatches you are making. These mixes will change from burnt sienna to ultramarine, light to dark, from left to right.



Mixing a limited palette of white, burnt sienna and ultramarine.

Once the initial burnt sienna–ultramarine mixes have been made you will then begin to mix the lighter tones, lightening a proportion of each colour in turn. The illustration on the previous page shows five tones underneath each of the top row mixes. Working with one colour at a time on the palette, take away approximately half of the mix; into this you will add a small amount of white. Mix thoroughly with a palette knife as you do this. Make sure that you don't add too much white all at once, as you need to experience how the character of each colour changes and to see how the colour lightens and 'greys' little by

little.

The process of mixing through the remaining rows as the tone becomes lighter and lighter remains exactly the same; take away an amount of each mix, place it underneath, add more white and make a swatch underneath of the resulting colour. Mixing carefully as you slowly make your way through each tone, experience how each colour mix not only de-saturates as you add more white, but notice also how each colour's temperature is affected and changes each time. Each colour becomes more neutral and 'grey'.



Hand study using a limited palette of white, burnt sienna and ultramarine.

The left-hand column of swatches shows only mixes of burnt sienna and white, while the right-hand side is of ultramarine blue and white

only. All the other mixes in-between have a proportion of all three – white, burnt sienna and ultramarine.

As you look at the resulting series of mixes that you have on your paper, or on your palette, it is possible to see how the mixes in the centre of the page are beautiful and subtle ‘greys’, both warm and cool, which will be useful for painting the subtle tones of flesh.

Gwen John

The quiet and contemplative portraits of Gwen John (1876–1939) demonstrate how carefully mixed greys can result in a beautifully calm and harmonious palette; her paintings have a range of colours that are so subtle and sensitively mixed. The subtlety of the mixes seems as if the artist herself used a similar limited palette when making these paintings, as the grey mixes within her portraits are so close to the range of mixes that have been made during this exercise.

Investigating tone and temperature: white, yellow ochre and blue-black

A limited palette of white, yellow ochre and blue-black is a good palette to use when painting under artificial light and it allows for analytical study of the tonal relationships of the figure and everything else within the composition. It is a particularly useful palette to use when introducing the notion of colour temperature for the first time.

If you have painted the figure under any type of artificial light you

may have found it difficult to decide exactly what colour is what, as when you observe it under electric light the yellowing quality of the light influences all colour, affecting how you may perceive it.

This limited palette gives a wide variety of warm and cool tones, when each of these three pigments have been mixed together in varying proportions. Yellow ochre is an interesting colour to use in this exercise as depending on what it is placed next to can result in it appearing either warm or cool. The colour blue-black is an actual pigment, which can be bought and it is made by Winsor & Newton. This colour is a very dark rich blue and when it is used in this limited palette it does make some beautiful greys with a lovely subtle mauve tint.

This limited palette was devised and used regularly by the painter Euan Uglow when working from the model or still life under artificial light. These paintings became known as his 'night-time paintings' – although they were not all painted at night, but when painting took place under any artificial light.

When looking through the Browse and Darby exhibition catalogue *Euan Uglow Night Paintings*, it is striking to see how contrasting this palette can be and how many mixes are achieved, not only in their tonal and temperature ranges but also in the great contrast of mood and light in these works.

The small painting *Nude on a Chair* (1963) shows a rapidly executed oil study of a seated nude. The marks are applied over the entire surface with a great energy. The scale of marks is large within the confines of the small board, which measures 9 × 9 inches. Not all the surface has been covered, the gestural brushwork allowing areas of board to show through. What is interesting is the cool character of this oil study: a pale mauve dominates throughout as the amount of yellow ochre is reduced within the mixes.

This contrasts greatly with Uglow's 1966 painting *Nude Walking*, which shows a girl striding across the interior of a room, the structure

of a door directly behind her, framing her form. The limited palette is now much warmer in feel. Again varying proportions of the three pigments have been mixed together. This darker and warmer tone oil painting shows the palette that can be achieved when using a greater amount of yellow ochre with less white. The resulting painting has drama in the lighting, but it is sombre in mood as a result of the dark mixes.

Girl Lying Down (1965) contrasts beautifully with its warm lighter mixes. The same three colours have been mixed together which results in yet another different character and contrasting with the other two paintings. Much more white has been added this time but with fairly equal proportions of yellow ochre and blue-black added. These so-called 'night-time' paintings demonstrate how contrasting – light and dark, warm and cool – this palette can be.

(These three paintings along with many other examples can be found online, in the Browse and Darby exhibition catalogue mentioned above, and in Catherine Lampert and Richard Kendall's 2007 book, *Euan Uglow: The Complete Paintings*.)

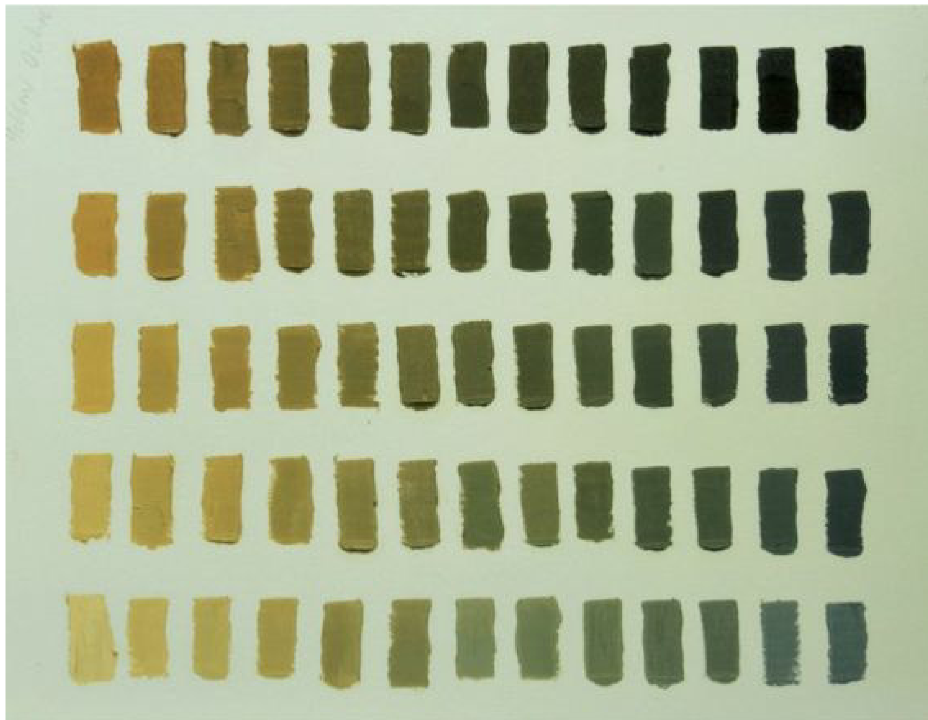
Colour mixing exercise: white, yellow ochre and blue-black

As during the previous mixing exercise (using white, burnt sienna and ultramarine) this palette will result in a large number of tones being mixed. Swatches of each mix will then be placed in rows on a sheet of paper as you did before.

As you begin to mix, remember to mix up enough paint, particularly during the earlier stages when mixing only yellow ochre and blue-black. Think back to the previous limited palette and its mixing. Did you find that you had enough of each mixture as you worked through the tones while adding white? If so, work with the same amounts as

before but if you ran out of paint and kept having to re-mix and match-up colour then try to use more paint this time.

In the illustration below you will see five rows of swatches; each row becomes lighter in tone as you move down the page. The top row of swatches is made with only yellow ochre and blue-black. These are the darkest and most saturated of all the colour swatches. Yellow ochre is placed on the left-hand side; on the right, blue-black.



A sheet of colour swatches made by mixing black, white and yellow ochre.

Beginning with pure yellow ochre, as you move from left to right

slowly add a small amount of blue-black into the yellow ochre. Remember to remove an amount of the yellow ochre and make a separate pool of colour as you add the blue-black. When this is thoroughly mixed using a palette knife, take away half the mixture to make a new tone. It is into this tone that you will add more and this procedure continues until you have made a series of mixes that become darker as they contain more and more blue-black.

When adding a small amount of blue-black at a time you will notice that the brightness of the yellow ochre begins to grey and darken as you move from left to right. The swatches in the centre of the row begin to look quite green and it is possible to begin to see a suggestion of warm and cool within these mixes as they sit next to one another.

Once you have worked your way through mixing a range of tones with yellow ochre and blue-black, you will begin to add a small amount of white into each of the mixes. Using a palette knife take away some of the mixed colour and into this add a small amount of white. It would be helpful if you arrange the tones on the palette as before so that each of the pools of paint moves through from ochre to blue. This way you can keep the progression of the mixes on your palette and not get the order mixed up.

Work through each of the mixes adding a small amount of white, as before being careful not to add too much at once, as this will de-saturate the colour. Make a series of swatches underneath the top row. Each patch must correspond with the one above it, as it derives from this mix. Carefully work your way through the tones, going from light to dark until you have completed this row.

The following three rows are created in exactly the same way, adding more white into each mix and making another row, and so on. Going from top row to bottom you can see how the tones becomes lighter and in the bottom left quarter you will see that there are a number of mixes that can be used for painting flesh.

It is possible to continue mixing further tones to make the light to

dark even more contrasting. This will be easier to do as you mix and work from direct observation as you translate tone for tone. When looking at the mixes together either on the page or the palette, you can begin to observe how some swatches look much warmer while others are cooler. Apart from the far left-hand column that only contains mixes of white and yellow ochre, and the right-hand column, of blue-black and white, all the other swatches have been made with varying proportions of all three colours.

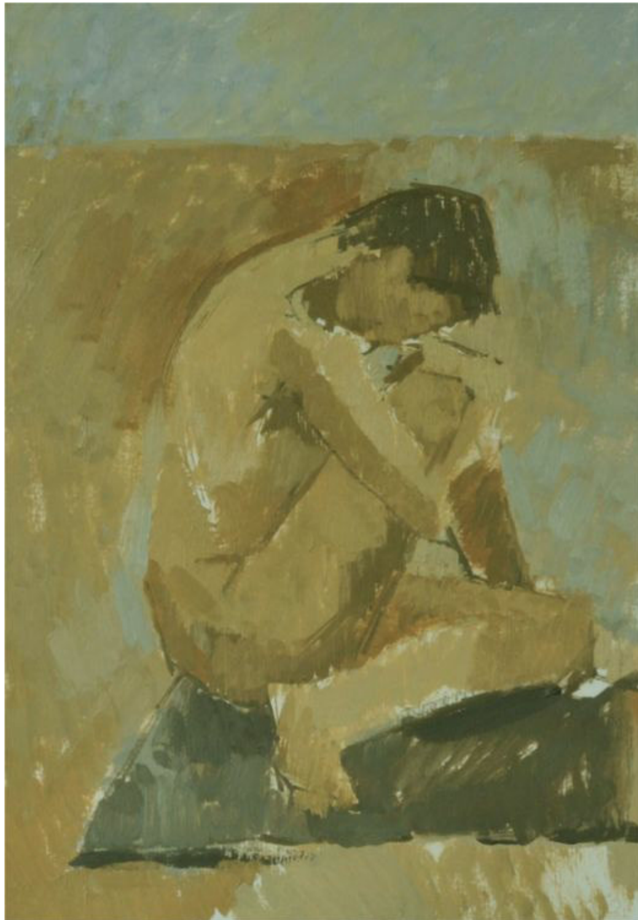


Figure study using black, white and yellow ochre.

When setting this task, I have occasionally seen students using each of the colours with very little mixing – using white for the lightest areas, yellow ochre for the mid-tones and blue-black for the darks.

When painting a study using this limited palette, try to make each mix contain an amount of all three colours, however small the proportion of some of the colours added may be.

These two particular limited palettes are very useful when painting the figure in both natural and artificial light. As noted before, reducing the number of colours we have on the palette makes us experiment and mix more carefully as we explore the possibilities that each palette gives. You may have your own preferred limited palettes, or try one of the following alternative palettes when making studies from the figure.

Ivory/Mars Black, Titanium White and mixed greys
Ultramarine, Raw Umber and Titanium White
Raw Sienna, Ivory Black and Titanium White
Venetian/Indian Red, Mars Black and Titanium White
Light Red, Mars Black and Titanium White

Exploring colour

During the nineteenth century many scientific treatises were written on optics, colour and perception. These new ideas were followed with great interest by the painters of the day. Michel Eugène Chevreul was one of the most influential of these scientists, as he was to produce the colour wheel of primary and secondary colours. He discovered that when two colours are closely juxtaposed, when seen from a distance they are perceived as another colour. This idea was fundamental to the Neo-Impressionist painters and their pointillist technique, and in particular to the group's founder, Georges Seurat. Many artists experimented with pointillism and the colour theories of Chevreul and Ogden Rood, including Camille Pissarro, Robert Delauney, Jean Metzinger and Henri Matisse.

Chevreul also discovered the connection between a colour and its opposing, or complementary colour. The Neo-Impressionist painters, particularly Seurat made extensive use of the interplay of complementary colours in their paintings.

Seurat and colour experimentation

The French painter Georges Seurat (1859–91) began to explore contemporary colour theories and made a series of personal explorations in colour and of how colours were mixed optically, when viewed side by side. When painting he began to use a number of small dots when applying the paint, a technique which became known as *pointillism*. These dots were of a varying scale and shape and were often placed in different directions depending on their position in the canvas, or what they were describing. When dots of contrasting colours were placed closely together they created a shimmering effect of light and colour. As Seurat painted the figure, the colours working together breathed life and light into the skin, and the subtle transitions of tone beautifully describe the form and contour of each body.

Seurat painted a number of nudes, both seated and standing figures. His painting *The Models* (1887–88) shows three figures, one standing and two seated, and the painting shimmers with light. The three models are positioned in front of Seurat's earlier masterpiece, the painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*(1884–86).

The central model stands facing out towards us, her hands clasped, while the two seated models, one with her back to us and the other seen in profile putting on her stockings are seen on either side of her. The figure with her back to us has a white drape placed loosely around her waist while the other seated figure is nude apart from the green

stocking she has just put on. The room is cluttered with garments strewn on the floor and the walls are decorated with other smaller works as well as *La Grande Jatte* painting.

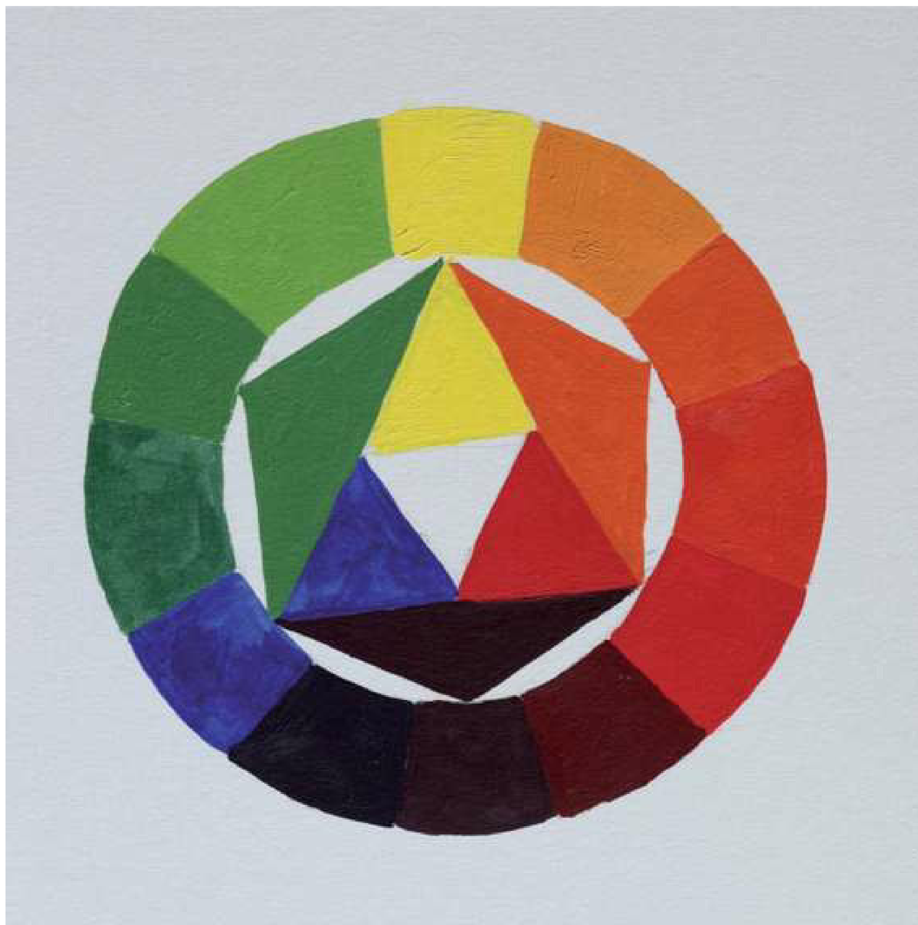
In preparation for this painting Seurat made a number of individual studies for each of the figures, both in drawing and painting. During 1886–87 he painted three remarkable studies of each of the three figures and a small version of *The Models* in 1888. In each of these paintings Seurat sculpts the figures' form and contour as he builds up the painted surface with small dabs and touches of paint. He is using optical mixing as small dabs of pure colour are placed next to each other. This is done in such a way that when you view the painting from a distance the small strokes of colour mix together. The small strokes of blue and orange of different tones and temperatures when placed side by side will appear as flesh colours when they are viewed from further away.

Seurat studied in depth the laws of colour and he sought to establish order in bringing together colour theory and the expressive potential of line. In his paintings Seurat used bright and saturated colours, predominantly warm hues to express happiness accentuated with upward moving lines. He believed that a sense of calm was created using horizontal lines along with the balance of light and dark, warm and cool colours. An atmosphere of sadness could be created using a dark palette of cold colours with lines that were directed downwards. In his research he studied O.N. Rood's *Modern Chromatics: With Applications to Art and Industry*, which was published in New York in 1879, and this was translated into French in 1881.

Seurat believed that colour could be used in painting to create emotion and harmony, just as a composer would use musical harmony. The painter studied the work of David Sutter, who in his writing linked the laws of optics with those of music. In his writing Sutter asserted, 'The laws of aesthetic harmony of colours are taught as

the rules of musical harmony are taught.’[6]

The colour wheel



The colour wheel.

The twelve-hue colour circle shows the relative positions of the three primary and secondary colours. This colour wheel has each of the primary and secondary colours in the centre pointing to their positions within the circle, as you will find in the treatise by Johannes Itten.

Johannes Itten (1888–1967) was considered to be one of the most influential teachers on colour and colour theory. He taught in Vienna, and later at the famous Bauhaus in Germany. His profound interest in painting and colour led him to be a highly respected teacher on colour theory. He believed in personal expression and spontaneity when using colour, and he saw relationships between music and colour, in particular the expressive abstract geometric paintings of the period.

The primary colours are yellow, red, and blue. If you are going to make your own colour wheel, use cadmium lemon, cadmium red and French ultramarine. In the centre of the wheel is an equilateral triangle, with each point touching a segment in the circle. Each of the three primary colours is placed into one of the points of the triangle, and the same colour is placed into the segment that each point then touches.

The secondary colours – orange, green and purple – are placed into the centre next to the two primary colours from which each is made, orange from red and yellow, green made from yellow and blue, and purple mixed from red and blue. The point of each of the triangles that contain a secondary colour touches and is contained in the segment in the central position of the primary colours on the colour wheel.

The final colours to be added to the colour wheel are the tertiary colours. A tertiary colour is made when mixing a primary with a secondary colour: for example yellow and orange = yellow-orange; red and orange = red-orange and so on. As the colours move around the wheel their sequence follows that of a spectrum or a rainbow. The

tertiary colours extend the palette further, resulting in many more possible combinations being mixed.

Complementary colours



Complementary colours.

The colours found directly opposite each other on the colour wheel are called complementary colours. When these two colours are mixed together they become a neutral grey. There are three pairs of complementary colours: red and green, blue and orange, and yellow and purple. Within each pair of complementary colours you will find that in each case all three primaries are present.

The extended palette

The majority of the paintings in this book, used either as illustrations or as exercises that show their step-by-step progression, use the same palette. This is the ‘extended palette’, which is also known as the ‘impressionist palette’ and it consists of a limited number of colours plus white. The colours that make up this palette are the three primaries, a warm and cool of each, totalling six pigments plus white. Alternatives to some pigments are in brackets.



The extended palette.

Titanium or Flake White
Cadmium Lemon (or Lemon Yellow)

Cadmium Yellow
Cadmium Red
Alizarin Crimson (sometimes replaced with Rose Madder Genuine)
Cerulean Blue (sometimes Cobalt Blue is used)
French Ultramarine

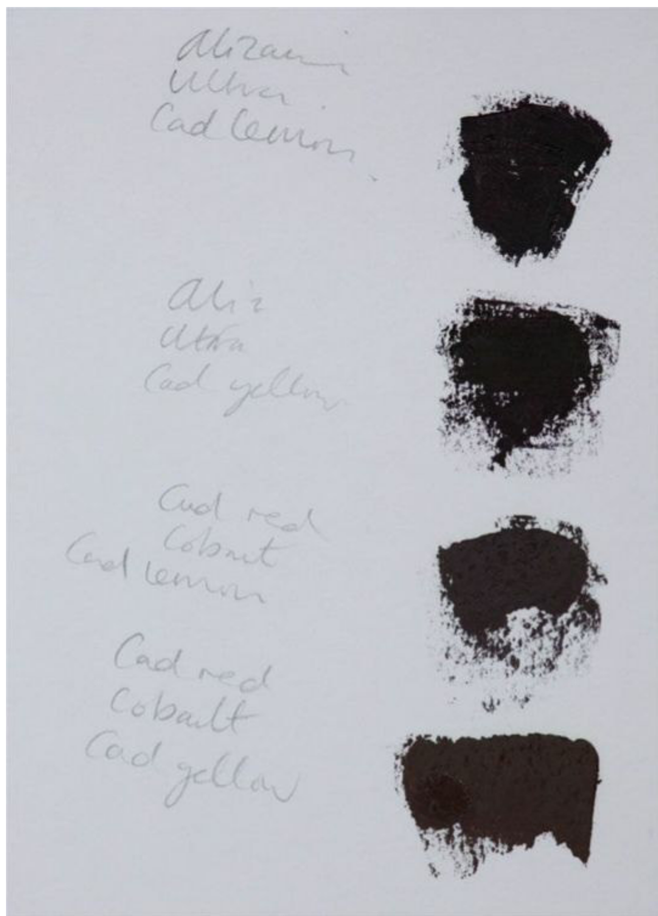
You will notice that there are no blacks included in this list of colours. I don't ever use any blacks directly from a tube on the palette. Any blacks that are found on the palette are 'coloured blacks' which have been mixed from varying proportions of each of the three primary colours. Mixing your 'blacks' in this way will result in a more interesting selection of saturated and dramatic tones to work with. They will seem brighter and richer when made with pure colour, rather than adding 'tubed' black into colour mixes which can result in colour being leached out, resulting in it becoming too grey and dull when placed on the painting.



The order of colours on the palette.

Using pure colour to make 'blacks' will enable you to achieve a wider range of warms and cools. You can judge how different blacks may appear when mixing alizarin crimson and ultramarine with cadmium lemon; compare this with a mix of alizarin crimson, ultramarine and cadmium yellow. The addition of either a warm or cool yellow will create a subtle temperature change when you see the

two mixes placed side-by-side on white paper.



A range of mixed blacks.

Another colour combination which will produce a rich coloured black once carefully mixed together is cadmium red, cobalt blue and

the addition of either cadmium lemon or yellow depending on a warmer or cooler dark being desired. Place a swatch of each of these next to the blacks made with the alizarin crimson and ultramarine mixes and see how these compare in colour and temperature.

In each case the red and blue mixes will make a dark purple colour. In adding a yellow, whether warm or cool, you have added the complementary colour of purple into the mix. This begins to neutralize the colour, reducing its brightness without it becoming too dull or by de-saturating it by adding white.

Colour characteristics and properties

In the following section the characteristics of each of the listed colours will be discussed. As you mix, each colour on the palette can vary in feel and consistency when compared to the other colours around it. It is only by experiencing how one pigment behaves when it is mixed with another that we may become familiar with each colour's individual properties.

You will find that some colours are transparent, while others are opaque. Colours will vary in permanence, saturation and strength with some pigments staining very strongly while others are much weaker and will disappear within a mixture. As you mix you will need to be aware of the strength of each colour – some you will need to add very little at a time while for others much more can be introduced. Different pigments and brands do greatly vary in consistency, with some paints being very smooth and creamy in feel, while some pigments can feel more grainy and textured; others you may find to be less oily or buttery.

The quality of paint will also influence the consistency and saturation of each colour. Student quality paints along with cheaper brands have less pigment and more oil and other fillers, so the

resulting colour may seem rather thin and you will need to use more of it. Artist quality colours contain much more pigment of a higher quality, resulting in brighter saturated colours.

Oil colour pigments

Whites

There are a number of whites available and which is the best one to choose can be quite a mystery when buying for the first time. Each white has its own unique characteristics, and how one white responds can be very different to another. The selection of the most suitable white will be determined by what you are going to paint.

Titanium White

This is one of the most widely used whites on the market. It is also commonly known as titanium dioxide, originating from ilmenite, a black titanium ore. This is an artificial mineral pigment and a tube is inexpensive when compared to many other oil colours. Titanium is slow drying when the pigment is mixed in oil. This is a very bright, pure white and is very opaque when used in mixing. Titanium white is an inert, non-toxic pigment that has the highest tinting strength of all the available whites.

Flake White

Flake white is one of the many names for lead white, another of which

is Cremnitz white. These lead whites are artificial mineral pigments and they are made from basic lead carbonate. The Austrian town of Krems (hence 'Kremnitz White') is known for its production of lead white pigment. Flake white is a pure white which is not overly bright (as titanium white can often be) and its good reducing power means that it mixes well with other colours. Flake white has a smooth, buttery consistency and when mixed with other colours it can help to speed up drying time when under-painting. This is a warmish white that is particularly good when used for flesh mixes. It doesn't have the opacity that titanium white has but it has a fairly good coverage. Lead whites have a fast drying rate and have been used since antiquity.

It is important to note that because of their high lead content, lead whites are extremely toxic. They are expensive as current health and safely legislation within the EU has made it prohibitive for colour manufacturers to produce lead whites. As a result, it is now difficult to find suppliers of flake white and Cremnitz white in the UK and EU but it can still be sourced in the US and outside of the European Union. It is advisable to wear barrier cream when using lead whites to limit direct contact as lead can be ingested through the skin. If you are handling dry pigment of lead white you must wear gloves and a dust mask for protection.

Zinc White

Zinc white is also known as Chinese white (as called in watercolour pigments), zinc oxide and Permanent white. This white is semi-opaque and it is a cool, bluish tinge. Zinc oxide is an artificial mineral pigment that was first introduced to artists during the early part of the nineteenth century. This white is very slow drying but it mixes well with other colours. It is best to apply the paint thinly as this white may crack if applied too thickly.

Yellows

Lemon Yellow

Lemon yellow provides us with a cool yellow on the palette, which is a good alternative to the more expensive cadmium lemon. Many manufacturers make this colour as a lemon yellow hue; this is a non-toxic alternative, as the genuine pigment for lemon yellow is highly toxic, containing barium chromate. Only one or two brands make lemon yellow, but it can be bought in the UK. This is an artificial mineral pigment that is slightly transparent. The genuine pigment is quite a pale delicate yellow, whereas lemon yellow hue tends to be a little brighter. If you are using genuine pigment, great care must be taken.



Cadmium Lemon.

Cadmium Yellow

Both cadmium lemon and cadmium yellow of all shades come from cadmium yellow pigment. This is derived from the metal cadmium, and the resulting pigment is the most widely used of all the yellows. Although this was first used during the nineteenth century it was still relatively scarce until the beginning of the twentieth century, when it

was fully developed as a pigment for artists. As pure cadmium sulphide these yellows are more expensive due to the quality of the pigment used in the oil paint. Cheaper cadmium pigments can be found on the market and these will have a percentage of barium sulphate added. The quality of pigments is always reflected in the price of the paint: cheaper pigment will be used in student quality brands while pure and therefore more expensive can be found in artist quality oil paint. The same applies to each pigment available to the artist.



Cadmium Yellow.

Cadmium lemon and yellow are both used within the extended palette. Cadmium lemon is a cooler light shade while cadmium yellow is a warmer mid-yellow. You can see in some paint brands how cadmium yellow leans more towards shades of orange. The cadmium pigment has a good tinting strength and is opaque unless it is mixed with oil and used in very thin layers when it will become more transparent.

The drying rate of yellows is very slow and as this pigment contains cadmium it must also be used with caution.

Reds

Cadmium Red

Cadmium red is a bright, warm orange-red and is a lot more opaque than many reds. It can also be found as cadmium scarlet, cadmium vermilion, and also cadmium light/medium and dark. As with cadmium yellows, the purer the pigment, the more expensive it is. This is an artificial mineral pigment and it was produced for artists as a replacement for the pure vermilion pigment that contained mercury. Cadmium red pigment is produced by heating cadmium sulphide with selenium.



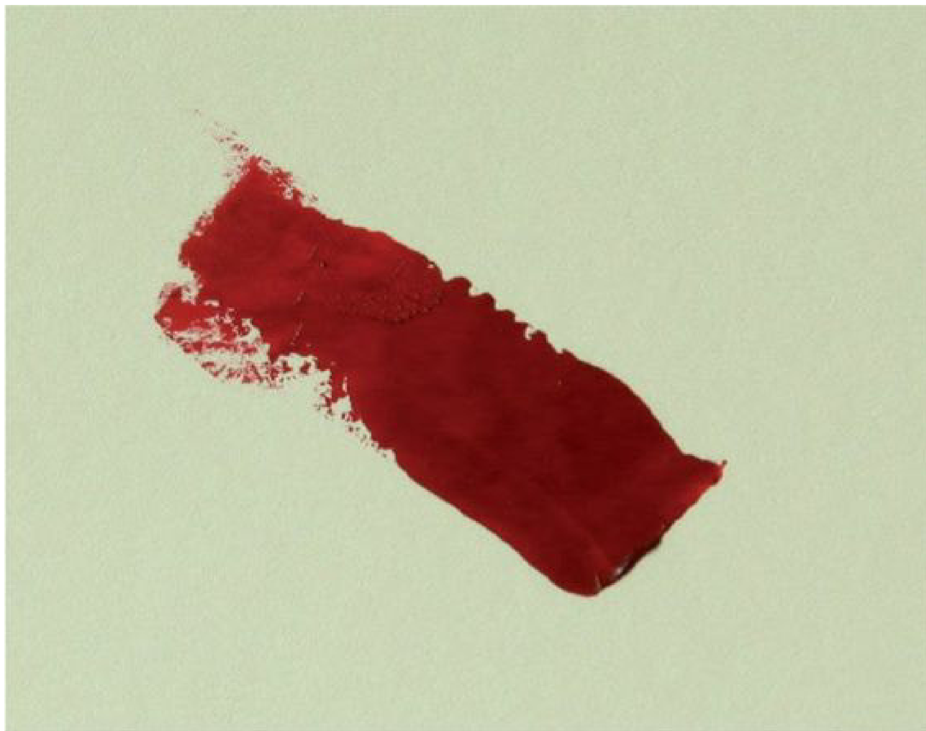
Cadmium Red.

As with many other reds, cadmium red is a strong pigment that is slow drying and as it also contains cadmium, care must be taken when using it.

Alizarin Crimson

Alizarin crimson is a cool red, as it is biased more towards purple on

the colour wheel, whereas cadmium red leans more towards orange on the colour wheel. Alizarin can also be found as alizarin carmine, crimson lake and alizarin madder lake. This is a dark shade of red and it has a very strong staining power. This is not one to spill everywhere! Alizarin is widely used and when bought as artist quality paint is fairly expensive.



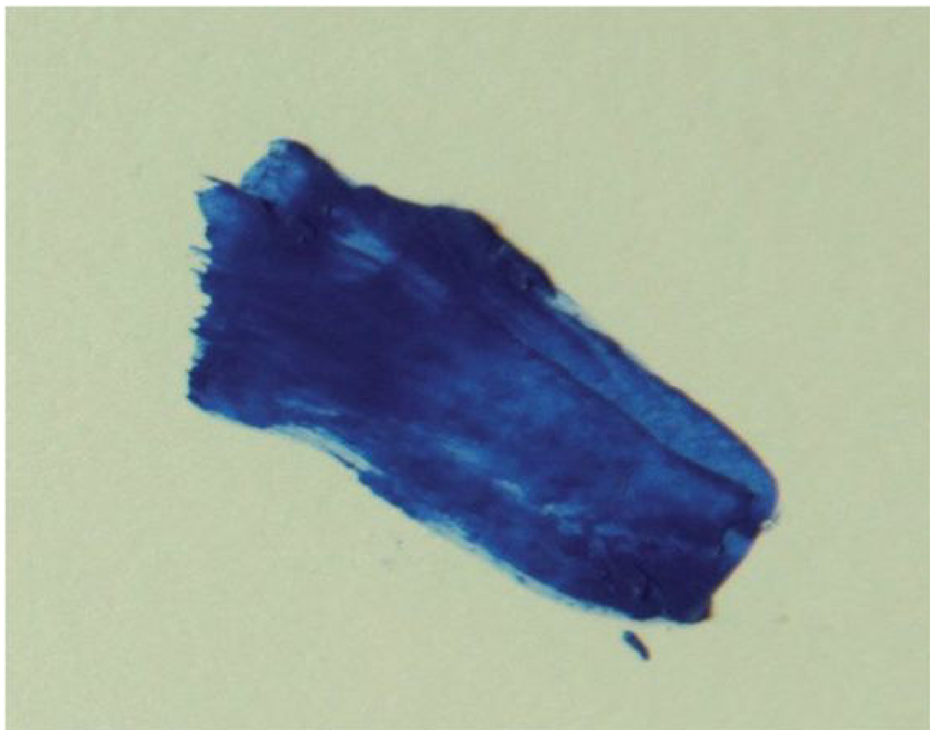
Alizarin Crimson.

Alizarin crimson is a synthetic organic pigment, which is made from the madder root. This is a transparent pigment and is ideal when used thinly for glazing.

Cobalt Blue

Cobalt is a delicate blue, which leans towards cool. This is an artificial mineral pigment that has been available commercially since the early nineteenth century. Cobalt blue derives from treated cobalt oxide (calcined) and aluminium oxide. Calcination is a thermal treatment process in which ores and other materials are treated in the presence of oxygen resulting in thermal decomposition. Cobalt blue is also known as Thenard's blue as it was developed by Thenard for commercial use during the early 1800s.

Cobalt blue is widely used, and it is an expensive pigment when bought as artist quality oil paint. It is a transparent blue, which makes it useful as a glaze, and it is fast drying.

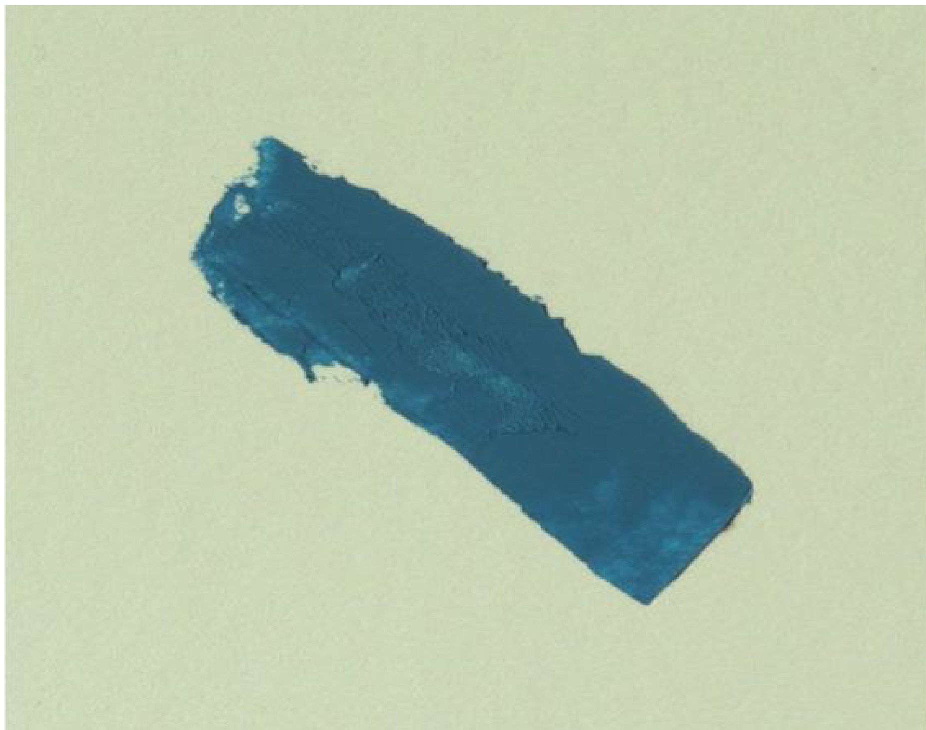


Cobalt Blue.

Cerulean Blue

Cerulean blue is a bright, semi-transparent greenish-blue, useful as a cool blue on the palette. It first appears to be a strong colour but when it is mixed with other colours it seems much weaker in strength. It is an artificial mineral pigment and is made by roasting together cobalt sulphate, silica and tin salts. The pigment is very expensive to buy; in

all paint ranges cerulean blue is one of the highest series numbers and amongst the most exclusive!



Cerulean Blue.

Ultramarine

Ultramarine pigment was produced in Germany and France (French ultramarine) from the 1830s as a cheaper alternative to natural ultramarine, otherwise known as lapis lazuli, which is a very expensive

pigment. Ultramarine is warm, as it is more biased towards purple on the colour wheel than green, which cerulean blue leans towards.



Ultramarine.

Ultramarine is widely used and is a fraction of the cost of Lapis lazuli. Ultramarine has a high tinting strength, now much stronger in intensity than the original Lapis, and it is a transparent colour. It is an artificial mineral pigment made by heating together clay with sulphur, soda and coal and is a fairly slow drying colour.

A note on lapis lazuli

The pigment that is derived from lapis lazuli is a beautiful deep warm blue. Lapis is a semi-precious stone and is composed of the mineral lazurite. Lapis lazuli was mined in Afghanistan and was imported throughout Europe through the trading port of Venice. Lapis was used throughout the Renaissance, becoming known as Fra Angelico blue. During the Golden Age of Venetian painting lapis was used extensively as it was readily available to the Venetian artists. This is seen most notably in the work of the Venetian Titian and his painting *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520–23) in the National Gallery, London. The stunning blue of the sky behind the figures and the intensity of the drapes of the garments of two of the female figures, including that of Ariadne, demonstrate this colour's purity and brilliance.

Other useful colours and their characteristics for use alongside the extended palette

Rose Madder

This is a beautiful red, and one that I will often have on the palette in replacement of alizarin crimson. This pigment does have a much weaker tinting strength when compared to alizarin crimson. It is also known as 'rose doré' and 'madder lake' and its pigment is made from the madder root. Rose madder is a deep pink which is transparent, very transparent when used as a glaze. It is very slow when drying and if it is exposed to sunlight can fade over time. This is one of the most expensive pigments to buy, as its production is rather time-consuming and costly to do.

Rose madder has been used as a pigment since the time of the Ancient Egyptians.

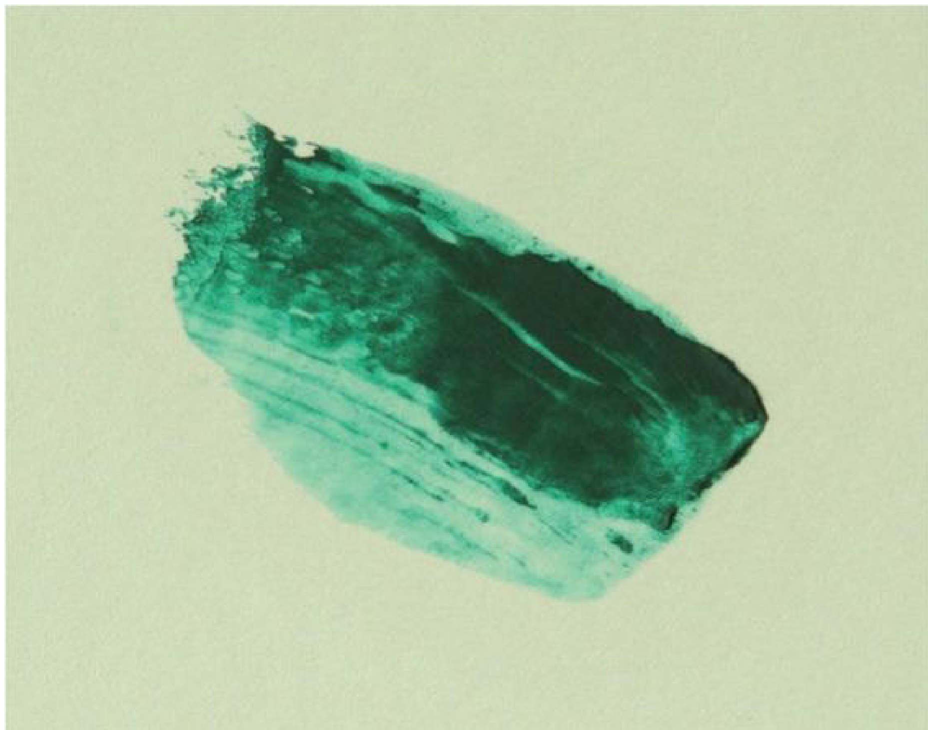


Rose Madder.

Viridian

This strong, transparent green pigment stains well and is a deep blue-ish green. Viridian is an artificial mineral pigment and is manufactured from bichromate and boric acid, which is treated then

washed. This pigment has been available since the early twentieth century and is an expensive pigment. Use this colour with care as it contains chromium.



Viridian.

The earth colours

Earth colours often supplement the extended range of colours on my palette. Below are listed some of the most common earth colours,

which are particularly useful when mixing flesh colours.

Yellow Ochre

Yellow ochre is a rich and opaque warm yellow that has excellent coverage. As it is a natural earth pigment its shade can vary according to its source. Ochre is formed when iron oxide colours clay (silicate) and chalk (calcium carbonate) in conjunction with water. As a pigment it is fairly slow drying and it is inexpensive as it is widely found.



Yellow Ochre.

Yellow ochre is used in one of the limited palette exercises and is discussed further then.

Raw Sienna

This pigment tends to be darker and more transparent than yellow ochre. Its colour may vary depending on the source and it can look quite different from one brand to the next. In some brands it appears as a warm deep yellow, and in others it may look quite brown. Once brushed out though it becomes a brighter, transparent yellow. Raw sienna is a natural earth pigment, which is fairly fast drying and has been used since antiquity. It is a mix of iron oxide and silica and originally it was sourced in Tuscany, Italy.



Raw Sienna.

Burnt Sienna

Burnt sienna is a rich and bright red-brown and has been made by calcining raw sienna pigment. Burnt sienna is also thought to date back to antiquity.



Burnt Sienna.

Indian Red

Indian red is a deep red which has a cool blue-red tinge. This tinge can be clearly seen if you mix a small amount of Indian red with a little white. During the nineteenth century when earth used for this pigment was imported it was mostly pure red iron oxide (over 90 per cent) but nowadays the pigment you will buy is a synthetic iron oxide.

This is a by-product produced through the process of calcination of ferrous sulphate.



Indian Red.

Venetian Red

This red is warmer when compared to Indian red. It has a pinkish hue Modern Venetian red pigment derives from the calcination process of ferrous sulphate with calcium carbonate (chalk). Depending on its

source, this proportion can vary resulting in a weaker tinting strength.

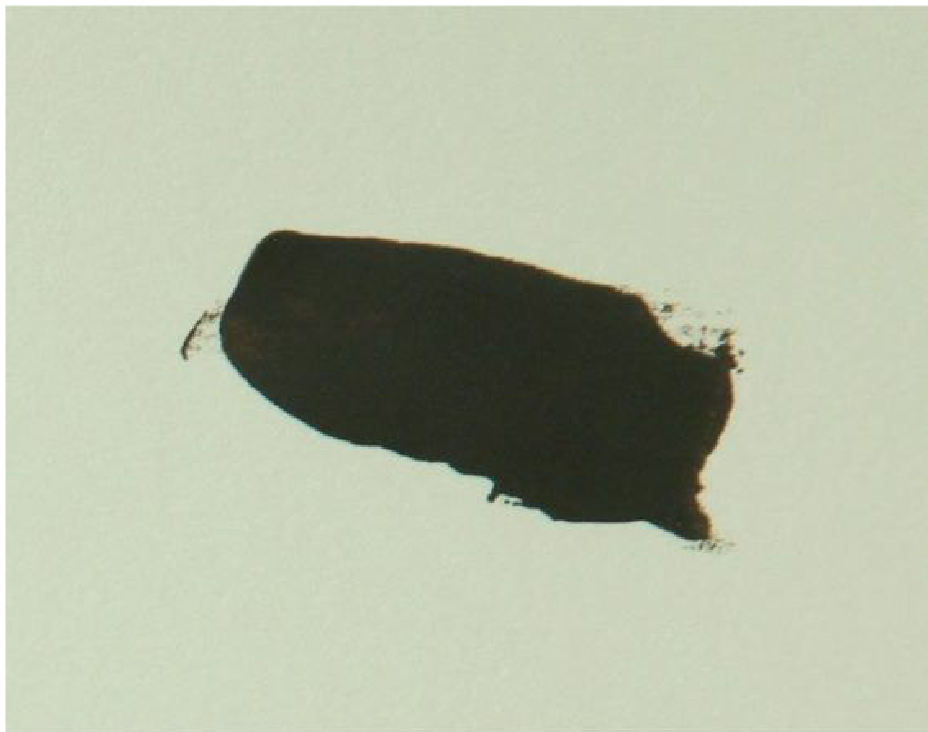


Venetian Red.

Raw Umber

Although I don't use raw umber for mixing on the palette, it is very useful for under-painting. It is a dark brown natural earth pigment and when diluted becomes a green-brown. Depending on the brand it can appear to be warm or cool. Raw umber derives from natural iron

oxide ore and depending on where it is sourced will have varying amounts of manganese and aluminium silicate. This is a transparent pigment and when diluted it does dry very fast which makes it so useful for the initial drawing and mapping out of a composition.



Raw Umber.

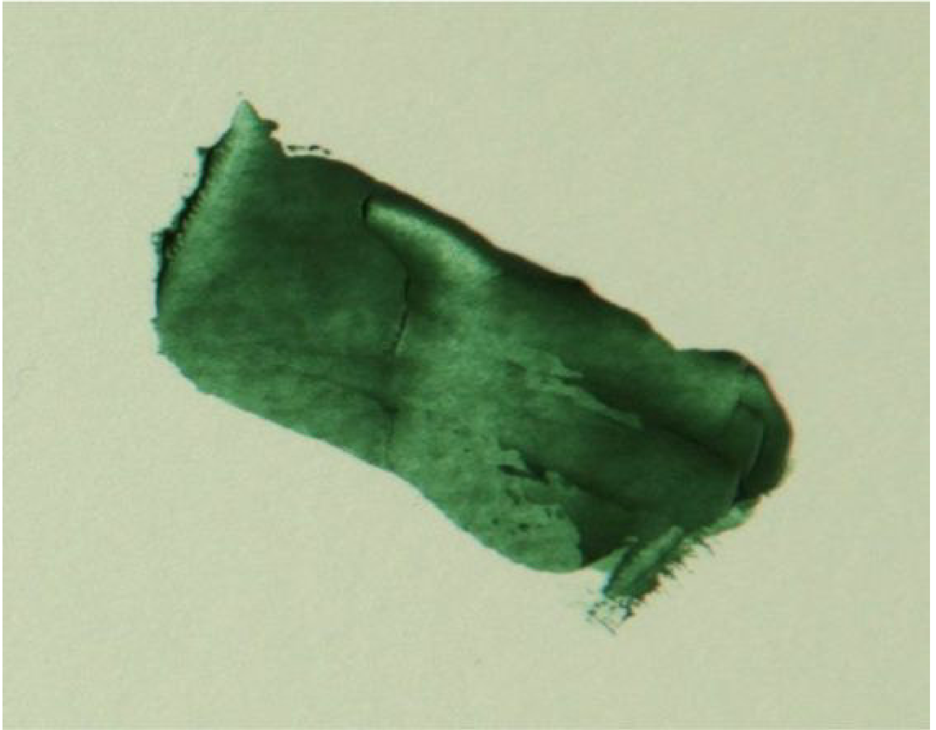
Because of the rapid speed with which raw umber dries, be careful not to use it over colours which are slow drying to avoid cracking and do add a generous amount of oil in the mixture to avoid it drying too quickly if it isn't being used for under-painting.

Terre Verte

Terre verte, also known as 'green earth' has been known of and used since antiquity. It is a very transparent pigment, which is a delicate warm greenish-grey, varying slightly depending on where it has been sourced. Although originally *terre verte* was a natural earth that was mined near Verona, Italy until 1940, it now derives from a clay coloured by iron silicate.

Terre verte has been used since medieval times, used when under-painting flesh. This can be seen in the *Manchester Madonna*, painted around 1497 by Michelangelo (National Gallery London). This painting, which remains unfinished, allows us to see how broadly painted shapes of terre verte were used as under-painting to establish areas of the body before warmer pinks and reds were placed over the top once dry.

Terre verte is a fairly slow-drying pigment so if you did wish to use it for under-painting, do prepare and leave enough time for it to dry before beginning to work over the top.

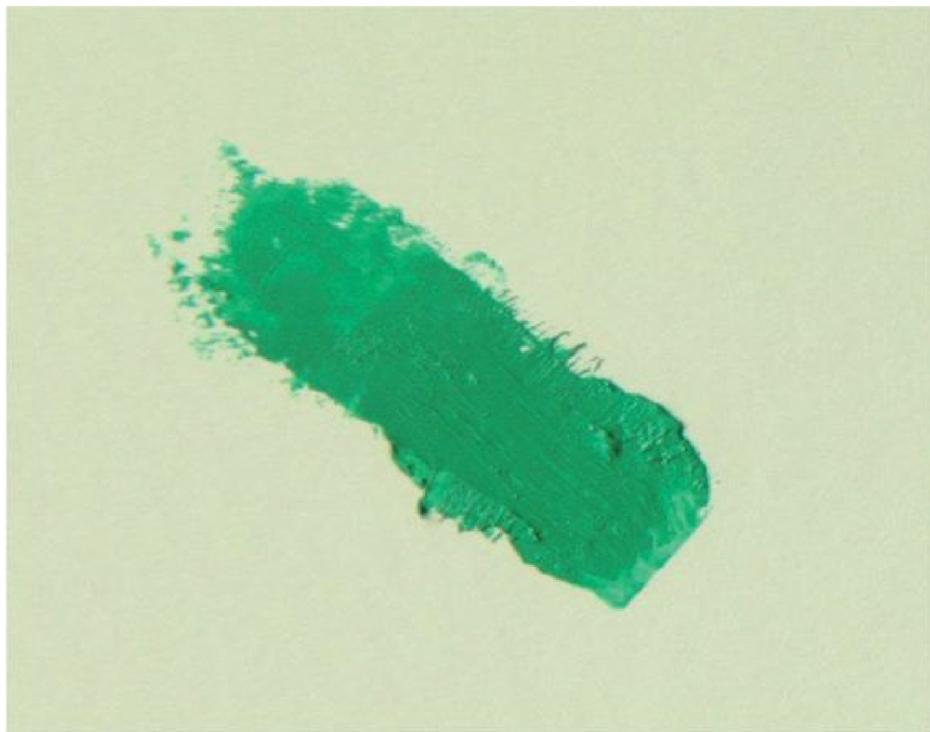


Terre Verte.

Colour mixing exercises using the extended palette

With so many colours to choose from it can be difficult to know which to select when standing in front of row upon row of tubes of oil paint in a shop, or when looking at the many colour swatches of oil paint

colour charts in a catalogue.



Emerald Green.

The extended palette listed earlier in this chapter is a good palette with which to start. This selection of colours will enable us to mix most of the colours in the spectrum that we will need. Sometimes, though, we will come across a colour that is difficult to mix using the extended palette alone, and then it will be necessary to add one of the other suggested colours onto your palette.

In theory we would mix all greens on the palette but having terre

verte (warm), emerald green (cool) and sometimes the inclusion of viridian can be useful. Additional colours can make the mixing process a lot quicker, and you may find that yellow ochre or raw sienna are 'must-haves' alongside the other colours.

Additional colours placed on the palette will help to increase the range of colour mixes you are able to achieve without the mixing taking up an entire session with your model. But do be cautious, as the use of too many colours can become problematic and may result in no particular colour key or harmony with the overall effect clashing and becoming too psychedelic.

A palette that consists of fewer colours, or a particular limited palette can give us a far more pleasing and harmonious colour range within a painting.

The following colour mixing exercise will show how a subtle delicate palette of 'coloured greys' suitable for painting flesh can be achieved when mixing from primary colours.

Mixing together cadmium yellow with alizarin crimson

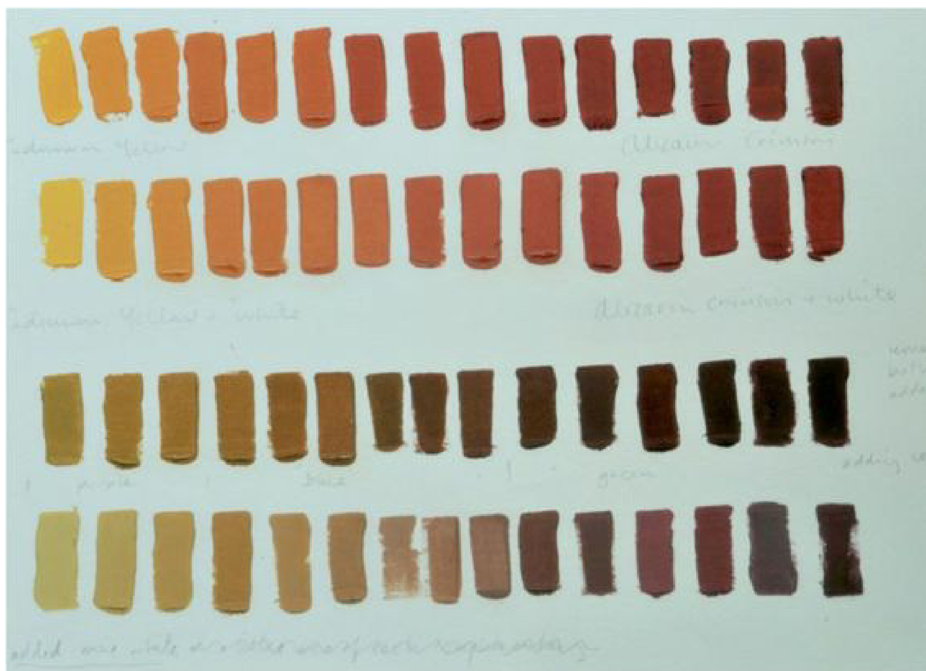
When first squeezing these two pigments from the tube, you may wonder how a subtle range of colours suitable for flesh can be mixed, as both yellow and red pigments are so saturated and strong.

The first mixes of colour you make will be bright, but by carefully mixing them in varying proportions and by also adding white and complementary colours it is possible to begin to make a series of colours and tones suitable for painting skin.

Paper is useful to paint on because as you work you can write notes alongside the colour swatches you are making, helpful reminders of colours used or proportions of colours making up each mix. You are

making a reference or aide-memoire of colour mixes that can be used to refer to as you work, as you become more familiar with how colours can be achieved and how colours change.

As you make a series of colour mixes on your palette you will make a row of swatches on the paper as you did with the two limited palettes (white/yellow ochre/blue-black, and white/ burnt sienna/ultramarine). The illustrations below and opposite shows how this exercise will result in five different rows of colour, so either divide the space on your paper into five rows, or you can use five different pages or separate pieces.



Colour swatches made with cadmium yellow, alizarin crimson and complementary colours.

The top row of colour swatches will all be mixes of varying proportions of the two primary colours, cadmium yellow and alizarin crimson only. Cadmium yellow is a warm yellow while alizarin crimson is a cool red.

As you begin this exercise remember to put out a generous amount of yellow paint on to the palette, otherwise after a few mixes you will have run out of paint and will need to begin the mixing process again. Beginning with pure cadmium yellow, make a swatch in the top left of the page. Remove a small amount of yellow (as you will be using this to add a small amount of white for the second row later). You will then begin to add a very small amount of alizarin crimson into the remaining yellow, mix in thoroughly using a palette knife so that the pigments are thoroughly mixed together with no separation of colour either in the mix or on the blade of the palette knife.

Don't add too much red all at once. Alizarin is a strong pigment and it stains very well so you will need to add the smallest of amounts as you mix. Remember it is better to add too little and not see the colour change enough and then to add more, rather than to add too much too soon which changes the colour far too rapidly so that you will need to add far more yellow to take it back towards yellow.

The top row of colour swatches shows how the yellow slowly changes from yellow to red, by adding a small amount each time so that the yellow changes from dark warm yellow through to pale then deep oranges, and finally the yellow in the mix has been reduced so much that we have pure alizarin crimson on the right.

With each mix, divide the pool of colour into two parts; one is used for the top row of swatches in its pure state while the other will be used for the addition of white, for the second row.

The second row shows how the colours from the top row have changed as white has been added. An equal amount of white has been added into each mix resulting in them being lighter and the colour being slightly de-saturated. As white is added it is possible to see each

colour’s temperature a little more easily.

The next stage is where things start to become really interesting as you observe how colours begin to ‘grey’ or to become neutral as the complementary colours are introduced to the palette.

Once the first two rows of swatches have been placed, the remaining colour can be mixed together, that is each original colour and its mix with white. Working through each colour in turn you will add a small amount of the colour’s complementary.

The third row of swatches shows how each mix has changed once the complementary colour has been introduced. The first three swatches on the left are yellow so small amounts of purple (mixed with alizarin crimson and ultramarine) are added. The following six swatches that are a more orange base are mixed with their complementary colour, blue, and the remaining six swatches which are deep red are mixed with green, the final complementary.



Resulting coloured greys mixed from this palette.

Each of the colours now appears to be darker and more subdued.

It is with the addition of white to all the swatches of the row underneath that we can really see how the saturated colours have been transformed into a series of beautiful coloured greys.

The final row has been made with further white and each complementary being added to the remaining mixes. These resulting colours are now closer to the subtle range of greys that we see in the paintings of Morandi, Hammershøi and Gwen John.

The initial mixes of pure saturated colour have now been transformed into a palette of harmonious greys and subtle colours, warm and cool, which can be used when working with the model.



Palette with extended palette of primary colours.



Colour swatches that have been mixed with cadmium yellow pale, alizarin crimson, ultramarine and white.

Using the extended palette

The colour mixing exercise using a limited palette of cadmium yellow with alizarin crimson and white resulted in a subtle range of mixes suitable for painting flesh once small amounts of each complementary colour had been added. The yellow in this instance was warm, while the cool red, alizarin crimson was used. As we introduce two versions of each primary colour onto the palette, a warm and cool of each will

allow us to extend the number of colour mixes we can achieve even further.

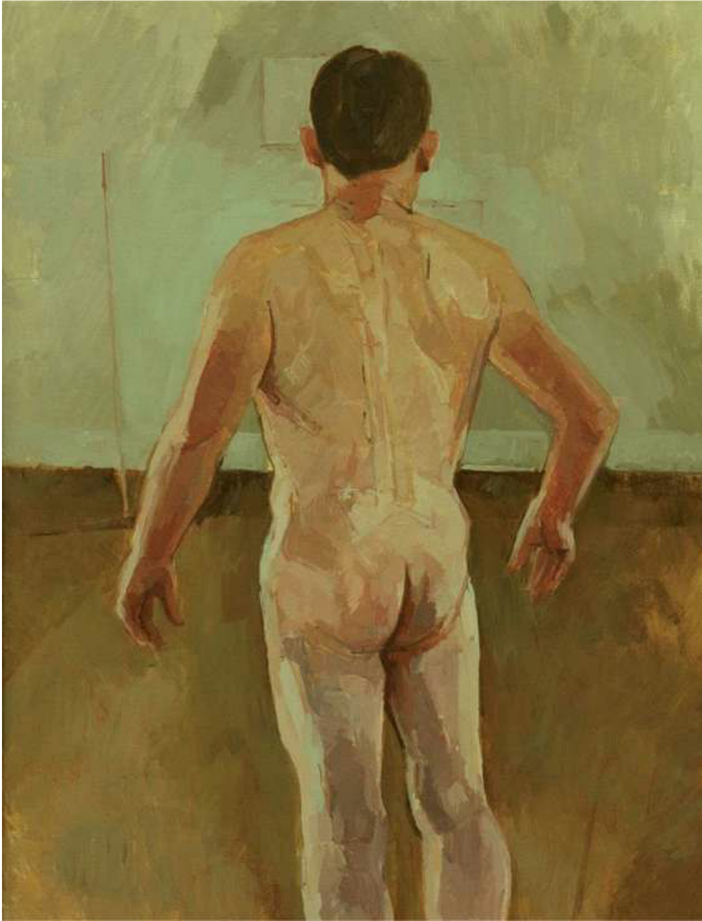
The following paintings of the figure have been made using the extended palette: white, cadmium lemon, cadmium yellow, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, cerulean blue and French ultramarine. With careful mixing, this palette allows you to mix an extended range of warm and cool colours, from bright saturated hues to subtle coloured greys.

After placing the colours on the palette in the order listed above, from light to dark, each of the secondary colours was mixed. These are then placed on the palette. Straight away the palette has been extended to primary and secondary colours. The three complementary pairs – red and green, orange and blue, and yellow and purple – are ready on the palette from the start before any more mixing has taken place.

These paintings are small-scale oil studies and have been made over three or four sittings, a much shorter period of time than the sustained poses discussed in Chapter 5.

Standing Male Nude

This small oil of a standing male figure (below) was made during three short sittings with the model. The man stands by a window and he is lit dominantly on the right side but there is also a secondary light source, a window on the far side of the studio, which illuminates the left hip and leg. Reflected light is also seen on the outside of the left arm and inside the right arm and hand.



Standing Male Nude.

The figure was drawn directly onto the canvas, with careful measuring of all proportions as the position of the model was established within the rectangle. The pose has a great sense of

movement as the model has his arms slightly raised, and with the slight rotation of the torso it appears as if he is about to move off at any moment.

The position of the model's arms gives a helpful number of negative shapes to refer to throughout the drawing process.

Once the drawing of the nude had been established, areas of colour were blocked-in quickly using fluid, sketchy brushwork. Large areas of colour were applied broadly to begin with, over both the figure and background. By the end of the first session all the surface of the canvas had been covered with paint. The paint on this occasion was applied slightly thicker than would be usual on a painting of a more sustained pose to enable the paint surface and colour saturation to build up more quickly. There was ample drying time between sessions for the thicker paint to be dry enough to work over the top without the paint layer underneath being disturbed.

In the following sittings, paint continued to be applied in a fluid manner. Over the back of the legs, buttocks and shoulders it is possible to see how the strokes appear fluid and drawn – nothing is too smoothed out or precise. The intention was to keep a sense of drawing with paint, with continued fluency in the paint application throughout the duration of making these smaller paintings.

During the third and final session with the model, paint was applied thickly, with a small amount of linseed oil being added into the paint. Colour is patched-in as it was during the first two sessions, but as time passes the areas of paint become smaller and more descriptive.

Two Female Nudes

These two oil studies of the female figure were painted over four sittings. For each painting the extended palette was used with the addition of raw sienna, and burnt sienna was also added to the palette

of *Curled Nude*. The two models have very contrasting skin tone and temperature. *Reclining Nude on Green* shows a model with pale skin, which is very luminous with delicate cool lemon mixes and warm pinks. *Curled Nude* shows a model with much darker, warmer skin colours.



Stage 1.

A stage of each painting will be shown side by side to show progression from the initial drawing and how paint has been applied during each of the four stages. Except for the addition of one colour to the palette of *Curled Nude*, the two oil studies show how from the same extended palette two contrasting series of colours have been

mixed to paint each of the two models: light and dark; cool and warmer flesh tones.



Stage 1 – patching in the first colour areas alongside the initial drawing.



Stage 2 – drawing continues, using mixed colour.

The pose is established using paint and brush; the initial lines can be seen in both studies. A dilute wash of *terre verte* was used for sketching out *Reclining Nude* while dilute raw umber was used to draw *Curled Nude*. In both cases the canvas was not stained with any colour beforehand, and paint was added directly over the white primed surface.

Colour is patched in over the surface of both canvases. The paint is opaque as it is applied, except for the green drape of *Reclining Nude* when the pigment itself is transparent. The green here will need more layers to build up the depth of colour required due to its transparency.

Where drawing continues in each painting, lines are placed

alongside patches of colour to show adjustments and boundaries of colour areas.



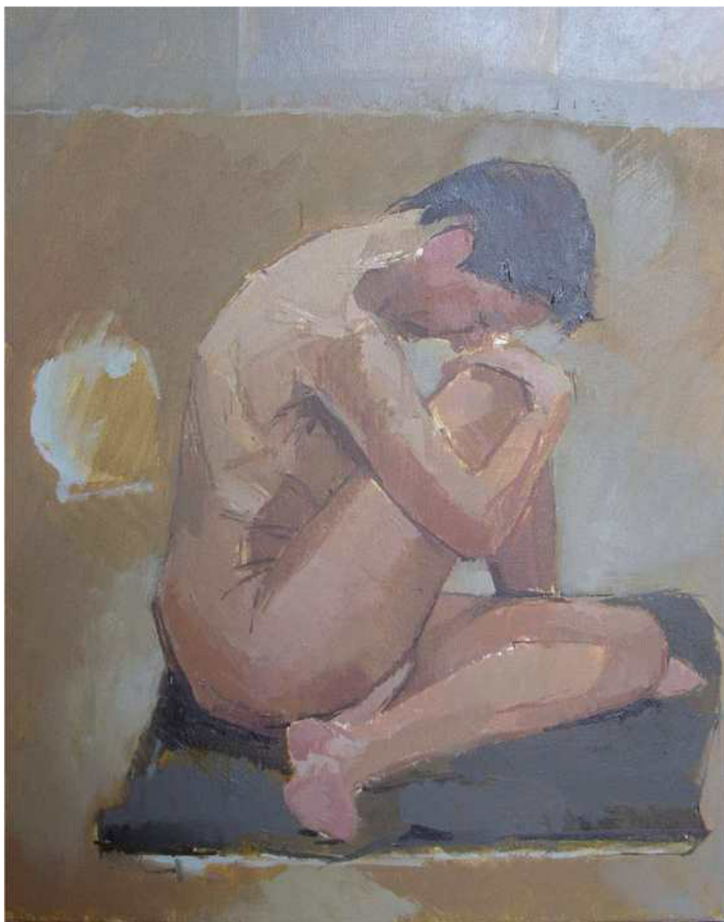
Stage 2 – boundaries of colour areas and adjustments are established, using lines and mixed colour.



Stage 3 – patches of colour being applied become smaller.

Colour continues to be patched-in with fluid brushwork while lines are used to establish any surface anatomy which can be seen within each figure. In *Curled Nude* darker lines are used to pick out shapes and structures, whereas lighter tones are used for drawing in *Reclining Nude*.

As paint builds up over the surface, the patches of colour start to become a little smaller, with the edges of each area being left visible so that they begin to describe contour and form more fully. None of the colour areas are smoothed out in either painting.



Stage 3 – using line surface anatomy is established.



Stage 4 – warm and cool colours become stronger as more colour is added

The colours become more varied as further attention is given to warm and cool colour relationships as well as giving greater differentiation to the contrasting passages over different parts of the body. This can be seen in *Reclining Nude* as the torso becomes brighter with lemons and pinks sitting side by side; the arms are a darker warm red and the legs cool mauves and ochre. Reflective colours such as the green on the side of her torso now appear richer.

Greater tonal contrast can be seen in *Curled Nude* as the darks become richer and there are more cool blues and mauves on the skin and within the bright areas of the background.



Stage 4 – the darker tones are increased, resulting in a wider range of tones throughout the composition.



Reclining Nude on Green.

Some of the lines in *Curled Nude* have been reduced but there is still an emphasis on drawing and line continuing in this oil study. As more small patches of colour have been added some of the tonal jumps from one area to another have softened a little. Colour continues to be patched-in in smaller and smaller shapes while drawing with colour is still evident throughout. More attention is given to areas of detail on the reclining figure, mostly on her hand and face. There is more modelling on her forearm and the greens are layered over the surface to make the colour more resonant and opaque.



Curled Nude.

CHAPTER 4

LIGHTING AND THE NUDE

Introduction

As we plan a new painting it is essential to take time to consider carefully how light will illuminate and describe the form of the figure. Before deciding on the position of the model in the studio it is important to be aware of how light changes throughout a morning or afternoon. The intensity and temperature of light will change throughout a session and if any direct sunlight enters the studio this will constantly affect colours and shadows that are being observed.



Seated Nude – Contre-Jour.

Will the light in the studio be directional or flat, dramatic or subtle, natural or artificial? Artists use light in many different ways; from subtle natural light to dramatic *contre-jour* effects, artificially lit to

shimmering pointillist dots of colour used to describe light falling upon the figure.

In the previous chapter limited palettes were explored, which are suitable for use when painting under different light sources; the palette of white, yellow ochre and blue-black, for example, being particularly useful when painting under artificial light with several examples of Euan Uglow's *Night Paintings* being discussed to demonstrate how a limited palette can be used to describe a particular lighting effect.

Lucian Freud was also known to paint using artificial light because this could then be totally controlled throughout a sitting with a model, and the light would be the same from one day to the next. Shadows and light intensity would remain constant because all natural light was blocked-out by heavy blinds placed at the studio windows.

The Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer (1632–75) is known for his masterly treatment and use of light within his paintings. His works, which are mostly small and intimate in scale, are of figures placed within domestic interiors. These rooms are in his home and this further adds to the level of intimacy and atmosphere that he achieves. Vermeer's paintings are characteristically illuminated by a window, which is placed on the left-hand side of the composition. Whether he is painting a woman reading a letter or a woman making lace, Vermeer suggests the play of light exquisitely, you can really sense the way in which light passes between the subject and the viewer.

When looking at the paintings of Rembrandt and Ingres we see how each painter has placed their figures within a dark setting or against a dark background, resulting in the light and colour of the model's skin appearing luminous.

Rembrandt's *Bathsheba at her Bath*, painted in 1654 and now in the collection of the Musée du Louvre, shows a nude young woman who is seated on white drapery. She holds a letter in her hand and seems totally lost in thought as an older maidservant washes her feet.

Rembrandt (1606–69) painted the figure of Bathsheba from a model; each fold of her flesh is acutely observed, as is the drapery on which she sits and the delicacy of the jewellery she is wearing. There is an incredible sensuality of this voluptuous nude, which contrasts with her thoughtfulness and apparent sadness.

The figure of Bathsheba is placed within a dark interior; her flesh and the drape are the brightest areas in the square composition. The rich and velvety darks of the background enhance the warmth and texture of her skin while subtle modulations of tone over her legs and arm, around her torso and breast creates a beautiful soft illumination as light touches her flesh.

Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, is a remarkable painting. The reclining figure is placed within a dark interior, the space directly behind her is a deep black and her skin glows against this rich dark background. Her head turns towards us, her gaze meeting ours. Her head is seen in three-quarter profile with deep warm tones being used to sculpt the form of her head. The deep turquoise drapery placed on the right-hand side of the composition further accentuates the warm hues of her flesh. Great attention to detail is given to all the surfaces and textures within the composition: flesh, silks and velvets are all beautifully observed and meticulously executed. It is as if there is an internal light which illuminates her skin from within and this makes her stand out from the darks around her.

Ingres drew inspiration from paintings such as Giorgione's *Dresden Venus* and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* although her pose directly echoes that of J.-L. David's *Madame Récamier* painted in 1800, which is also in the Louvre.

In his 1808 painting *The Valpinçon Bather*, Ingres masterfully describes the figure with incredibly subtle modulations of tone to describe her form. The composition of this painting is beautifully harmonious, as the figure sits with her back to us, and her head turns away in the other direction lengthening the line of her neck. The pose

is both elegant and graceful, which further adds to the quiet atmospheric mood of this painting.

Light touches the left side of her neck and shoulder, sensitively sculpting the volume of the figure as if she were made of marble. The figure is placed against a dark warm grey which highlights the pale amber hues of her torso.

The background grey is modulated so that the lighter left side of the figure is placed next to a darker grey ground while the right side of the figure is darker and the background grey appears lighter.

It is possible to see how the pose of the *Valpinçon Bather* has been re-worked within the composition of Ingres' *The Turkish Bath*, painted in 1863.



Alan – Contre-Jour.

Painting the nude contre-jour

Painting the nude *contre-jour* or 'against the light' can create a dramatic and beautiful image of the figure. When painting a subject against the light, the figure or object will therefore be placed between yourself and the light source, for example a window that is placed directly behind the figure. Many artists have painted the nude in this manner, with notable examples being Degas and Sickert.

When you are setting up the pose, try to find a place for your model and studio furniture/props so that the light source will remain as constant as possible. If the sun is shining directly into your eyes at any time during your sitting this isn't going to help. Do make sure that you are in a position where any shadows will remain constant in shape and depth of tone. If you are working on a painting over a full day you will find that the temperature of colours and the shape of shadows etc. will change. You may wish to filter the light in some way if the direction of the light or its intensity is a problem. A light thin blind or simply white tissue put up at the window can be enough to filter an intense light without losing vital contrast of light and shade.

Painting a figure or subject against the light will give you intensely strong light to dark contrasts. If you look at anyone who is standing against a window, or any other bright light, you will see that the overall tonal values of the figure, and other parts within the composition do appear very dark against the brilliance of the light source behind. If you can find reproductions of the paintings described below you will see how dramatic this light effect can be on the figure.

Masters of *contre-jour* painting

Degas was a master of painting the figure *contre-jour* and this light effect can be seen in a number of his works. Although these were not generally of the nude, the images of the figure clothed are as powerful

and dramatic. The theme of laundresses and women ironing began during 1869 and this theme continued to occupy Degas throughout the 1870s. The artist was attracted by the effects of the bright sunlight within the hot steamy conditions of the laundries. This subject matter gave the artist the opportunity to explore and experiment with the dark rhythmic shapes of the women, which are accentuated and picked out by the light behind. The paintings *Woman Ironing* (*c*. 1880) in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, and *Woman Ironing* (1874) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, are stunning*contre-jour* images. They are beautiful studies in simplicity, showing the essence or bare essentials of the composition, with dramatic contrasts of tone produced with a limited palette. The figures appear to be monumental within their interior. Only their essence is important so no features or any other unnecessary details are included.



Reclining Nude On Green.

The painting *Woman at a Window* (1871–72) in the Courtauld Gallery, London, is an exquisite example of *contre-jour* painting. This is a fluid and painterly image of a woman dressed in black who is placed against a window. Here Degas uses an experimental approach using *l'essence*, a technique that allowed Degas to experiment with paint more as a drawing medium. *Peinture à l'essence* is a way of using paint which is closer to drawing. The brushstrokes are broad and painterly with the scale of mark being large over the surface of the painting. Degas is drawing in a direct manner with a brush; the brushstrokes describing the chair on the left, for example, are minimal, very sketchy in approach with an economy of mark-making being evident.

The technique of *peinture à l'essence* involves draining most of the oil from the paint using blotting paper. The paint is then diluted with turpentine to a consistency that is more akin to watercolour and enables the paint to dry more quickly. Depending on how much oil has been drained from the paint the resulting finish can look chalky and appear as a pastel effect.

There are no features or even a suggestion of features on the woman's head. Instead very subtle transitions of the darker tones describe the head as it is seen in silhouette. Her hands are described a little more fully in terms of light and dark. The painting, on a brown coloured paper appears to have been stained with a wash of crimson. In places, small slivers of this crimson break through the gestural mark-making of the figure and the light of the window.

The painter Walter Sickert saw the painting *Woman at a Window* at the Durand-Ruel Gallery, Paris in 1902 and in a letter to William Eden he wrote, I have just bought Degas' finest work, had an eye on it 12 years or so.'[7]

In Bonnard's *Le Cabinet de Toilette* of 1908 (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels) we see a painting that positively

shimmers with light. Within a brightly lit interior we see a model standing. She appears very dark in tone as she is seen against the brilliant light shining through the window and reflecting off the surfaces in the room.

A light cool line delineates the dark figure in a few places – at her shoulder, on her breast, front of thigh and ankle. All the other areas of the body are dark in tonality and her form is described by subtle modulations of tone. The model in this painting is identified as the artist's wife Marta, and the pose is reminiscent of that seen in *Nude in the Studio* by Matisse.

The whole painted surface is covered in small expressive and gestural marks making everything appear to shimmer; nothing remains static except for the standing figure placed just off centre of the composition.

Walter Sickert and Degas met frequently in Paris during 1902 at weekly dinners. Degas' *peinture a l'essence* technique influenced Sickert's own work, and we see echoes of Degas' 'painterly' essence technique in some of Sickert's experimental oil studies, for example *Putana a Casa* (1903–04) and influencing paintings such as *Two Women on a Sofa: Le Tose* (*c*. 1903–04).

Sickert's painting *Girl at a Window, Little Rachel* (1907), which can be found in the Tate collection, is a striking example of *contre-jour*. A young girl is placed on the far left in the composition next to the window. The dark tones used for the young girl means that she almost disappears into the dark of the window frame.

Dramatic lighting and *contre-jour* effects can be seen in a number of the series of so-called 'Camden Town Nudes' that Sickert painted during the early 1900s. These show us the female nude, each seen in a domestic setting. These nudes aren't in the slightest way idealized; they are stripped of all notions of 'ideal beauty' and are placed within dark and gloomy interiors. These figures are often placed on a wrought–iron bedstead and there is a sense of vulnerability of these

women in a space that suggests a sense of grittiness and danger. Are these women prostitutes? What is the figure of a man doing?

Sickert's *Mornington Crescent Nude – Contre-Jour* (Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1907) shows us a reclining female figure, propped up on one elbow, looking out of the canvas directly at us. Such is the dark tonality of the figure and head that we don't actually see her expression though we know she is holding our gaze. The surface of the painting is covered with small direct brushstrokes, almost 'pointillist' in fashion. Small flecks of light along the top edge of her hip, thigh and shoulder let us 'read' the position of the figure. The lightest point in the composition is the light from the window while the other lights don't quite have the same intensity. Other very small patches of light are found throughout the composition but everything else is incredibly dark in tone. With eyes half closed examining the painting we see the subtle outline of the reclining figure.

Exercise

The three paintings discussed step-by-step in the following chapter demonstrate very different and contrasting poses. All of these paintings were made over a sustained period, either an intensive number of days together, for example a five-day pose, or of a pose repeated each week over many months, such as *Tranquillity*.

The painting used in this chapter to demonstrate each stage, step-by-step, is a foreshortened reclining figure painted against the light or *contre-jour*. This curled and rhythmic pose shows both a warm palette and a widely contrasting tonal range.

The reclining pose is often the preferred choice of any model about to embark on a sustained pose. The body should be well supported in any reclining pose with pillows, cushions or extra drapes if needed.

Curled Nude: Contre-jour

Palette used:

Titanium White
Lemon Yellow
Cadmium Yellow
Raw Sienna
Cadmium Red
Alizarin Crimson
Cobalt Blue
French Ultramarine



Contre-jour (limited palette).

This painting was made over a five-day period, an intensive sustained pose held each day for all of the five days. Due to the nature of a long continuous pose such as this, it was decided that the pose should be a reclining one, on a *chaise-longue*. The model is very experienced at holding poses over this length of time, and also at holding poses that are quite complex and often with a curl or twist, which is more unusual when concentrating on a sustained pose.

This curled pose not only has the dramatic lighting provided by the *contre-jour* effect of the bright light from the wall of large windows running directly behind the reclining figure, but there is also the extreme foreshortening of this viewpoint to contend with. There's nothing quite like a challenge!



Establishing the composition.

The position of the model within the rectangle is carefully established on the canvas. Time was spent beforehand using a viewfinder to visualize how the figure would fit within the edges of the stretched canvas. A rigger brush and dilute oil paint is used at this stage to enable drawing directly with the brush from the very start. A dilute raw sienna was selected as it is close to the darker tones of the skin. In this first image you can see how the centre of the canvas has been marked with a cross; the vertical line touches the inner edges of both knees, which is a useful relationship to be aware of when checking and re-setting the pose later on. The horizontal line of the cross runs through the central point of the shoulder joint, that which is nearest to us. As this horizontal line continues over to the left it cuts directly under the base of the skull, and also at the point where the hair meets the drape.

Being aware of the position of these horizontal and vertical lines is very helpful to us when checking our own position in relation to the model; also the knowledge of where such lines intersect the pose to help us to check and correct the model's position if something changes along the way.

Adjustments to the under-drawing can be made at any time by brushing over an area using a small brush and clean turpentine, or wiping out any lines made on the surface with a small amount of turpentine on a cloth. The back of the head and the hip are two areas where this has been done. Drawing can then continue as before using brush and paint over the rubbed out area. Don't worry about trying to remove all the paint, as often the canvas will remain slightly stained where an area has been rubbed out. This can be a pleasing surface to work on, however.

As other essential lines are established at this stage, nothing is too detailed. Because of the complexity of the foreshortened pose, double-

checking every measurement made is very important. Note how short the length of the body is: the breast and abdomen are almost underneath the lower thigh. Other measurement marks can be seen over the entire surface, showing how the length of the head has been used as a unit of measurement to work out the scale of the figure within the composition and rectangle, both vertically and horizontally.

The diagonal in the distance shows where the line of windows will be, and this line also serves to keep and hold the eye within the space immediately around the figure.



Beginning to patch-in colour.

Once the drawing of the figure has been established, the large areas of white immediately around the figure are blocked-out using a number of warm grey mixes. Looking at the fluid brushwork it is possible to see that this has been done quite rapidly using dilute paint. At this stage no further paint is put on the figure. The subtle colours placed around the nude will help to establish the tonal range of the composition from the earliest stages, with the dominating large areas of white being obliterated. The paint has been quickly brushed over the canvas, the strokes changing direction as the hand moves rapidly over the surface.



Dark and light relationships are established over skin.

The next session begins with layering a more opaque colour mix over the surface of thinly applied dilute paint from the previous session. As this was thinly painted it was dry enough to apply new paint over the top without the surface of the paint being disturbed and mixing with this fresh application. This won't always be possible but the studio on this occasion was rather warm and the under-painting had sunk rapidly into the canvas. This of course is as dependent on environmental factors as it is on the consistency of any paint being applied.

At the bottom left of the composition, and the bright area over the top of the figure, you can see how the more thickly applied paint is resting over the top of the first layer. It is still slightly textured with brushstrokes visible, allowing in places for some of the underneath colour to come through. The under-painting has both an energy and vitality to it and it is elements of this energy of the paint application that I would like to stay in evidence in the final painting. These initial loose washes contrast with the more refined areas, which develop as the painting progresses through each sitting.

In the second image of this painting you can see how the background area has been blocked out quickly using only three or four tones giving us the chromatic range of the painting. In the same way the tonal range of the figure is established using as many tones with loose blocks of colour applied quite quickly.

The patches of colour being added are greatly simplifying the shapes within the figure. A colour patch describes each of the following areas: the side of the neck, shoulder, arm to wrist, left knee and hand which are painted as one colour; the cool mauves of the drape next to the skin are also simplified down to light and dark. As other shapes are established, drawn lines determine the edges of one colour plane next to another. This can be seen on the right thigh – the line shows the edge of the darker plane that is in shadow, against the turn of the brighter edge that catches the light. Modelling is also

suggested around the hip using patches of tone in the same way. The hand and foot are painted as a simple shape of one colour at this stage. The diagonal of each is following the same direction.

A dark colour is applied for the hair; its dark tone is placed early on and will allow for a comparison of all other tones within the canvas. Importantly, this allows us to see whether the darker tones are dark enough when judged against this one area of tone. Within each area the paint is applied loosely so that the movement of the brushstrokes is clearly visible. The paint being diluted with just a little turpentine allows for it to be placed onto the canvas quickly whilst retaining some texture, which demonstrates the energy of the first layer of paint as it was placed on the surface.

When putting on subsequent layers, try to maintain this looseness and let patches of the under-painting be visible alongside the more refined layers of the painting.

Paint being applied during the next sitting is thicker and more buttery in consistency so it appears opaque when put on the canvas. Colours are no longer being diluted with turpentine, but instead a small amount of medium is mixed into the paint, in this case linseed oil.

Drawing is continually checked and revised using mixed colour. As the painting progresses lines or edges of colour areas may have been painted over or have disappeared during the earlier stages. If this happens, re-establish any of the lines. Most of the work this session has concentrated on the area around the figure. Cool grey mixes are painted over both the back of the *chaise-longue* and the area of floor in the distance. Although the paint is being applied more thickly, I have been very conscious of the under-painting and in adding more paint being careful not to obliterate totally the brushwork of the underneath layers. This results in the paint surface remaining more ‘painterly’ as we continue to see small areas of colour showing through the subsequent applications. No areas of colour are so opaque or flat as to

result in complete loss of the under-painting beneath.

In the bottom right of the canvas a mauve area is placed over the warmer tone underneath, which slowly becomes a cool, ochre against the mauve drape. Both under-drawing and the tone wash are still evident as the paint surface builds up.

All the canvas has been covered with paint of some kind, whether it is a dilute wash or opaque in nature. As the paint surface builds up, the areas of colour remain quite open. By this I mean the paint is applied quite freely, trying not to make any area too tight or defined. While keeping the brushwork loose, this doesn't mean losing any of the drawing as you work. You can see where lines have been used to either re-establish an earlier mark, or where an area needs to be accentuated further.



Warms and cools are established.

More paint is now added to the figure, the area over the arm and shoulder. The colour doesn't differ greatly from the layer that is underneath, but smaller transitions from one area to another are beginning to be suggested to create modelling of the three-dimensional form. A cooler patch of mauve on the back of the shoulder is put down as a reminder of its influence and of how colour is picked up and reflected in the skin.

Work now continues over the entire surface during this session with the model. Adjustments and refinements are made on both the figure and the surrounding areas. Although shapes have been picked out of the drapes, to describe the furniture on which the model is reclining and have become more defined, the intention is to keep an overall sense of abstraction in the shapes of both the fore-shortened figure and the space around her.



The paint surface builds up as further colour patches are added.

The areas in the foreground have become more defined in shape, the colour brighter – the colour is flat when compared to the areas of colour sitting next to them which remain more fluid and sketchy. Drawn lines have further defined the placing of the hand against the profile of the face, the change of direction of the planes moving from the shoulder up the side of the neck and form of her hair.

During this sitting more attention has been given to describing the form of the hip, side of torso and the front of the right top thigh. The overall tonal range hasn't changed greatly in these areas, but within

each area we begin to see subtle transitions of colour, tone and temperature. The edges of these colour areas remain; nothing is ever blended and each patch of colour becomes smaller and more subtle in character so that the eye doesn't have a huge jump from either one tone or colour to another.

A cool and bright pale blue has been placed in the negative shape created by the face, hand and knees as a way of helping to push the knees forward in space, and to also accentuate the darker tones of the *contre-jour* effect.



Detail of patches of colour on the arm and side of torso.

The image here shows a detail of the passage moving over the arm

and side of the torso and hip. This close-up reveals how some of the white of the canvas still shows through between some of the brushwork and scratch marks (which have been used to define an edge). You can also see that against areas of thicker opaque paint there are still areas where the under-painting can be seen, in particular over the upper arm and shoulder. Flat areas sit next to textured; thinner under-painting is set against opaque; and linear against tone. On the right side of the image it is possible to see how the bright edge of the hip is made up of small patched-in areas of colour that are close in tone, with subtle changes in colour temperature being used to describe the contour of the form.



Abstract nature of shapes of colour over the figure.

This detail shows the abstract nature of the shapes of the curled nude. Through the tones of the hair we see dashes of the mauve under-painting, and how thickly painted areas are adjacent to very thinly applied patches of colour. When seen close-up the shapes of colour over the knees, upper arm, etc. appear loose and fluid.

In this final image of the painting in progress a small number of dark shapes have been added where there needed to be more definition, mostly behind the head, the small negative space between the head and hand and a few areas of the *chaise-longue* and drape. Alongside these, a few light accents are added. The paint surface is further built-up in areas where the paint had 'sunk' and looked dull. Throughout this final session linseed oil was added to all the colour mixes being used.



Final adjustments.



Curled Nude – Contre-Jour.

CHAPTER 5

THE SUSTAINED POSE

What is a sustained pose?

This chapter is dedicated to painting the nude in the sustained pose. A sustained pose is a longer type of pose, which is set over a certain period of time that allows for analysis, reflection, revision and re-evaluation throughout the painting process.



Seated Nude, Helen.

When considering the sustained pose we have to think about the set-up and process as being quite different from when we work in a much more immediate way in response to either a particular lighting

effect, or a variety of dynamic or contorted poses which couldn't be held for longer than a few minutes, let alone a few hours!

Sometimes the practicalities of finding a model and the availability of everyone involved, whether individually or in a class situation, can result in painting short pose after short pose, with nothing continuing beyond one or two sessions. It can be difficult to find courses and workshops that are dedicated to working from longer poses, but there are a few institutions that do offer the possibility of working from a model in a longer pose. By searching online you will be able to select from weekly courses that set the same pose for a number of consecutive sessions to more intensive five-day or two-week long courses.

It was during my time at Art School that I began to work from a number of longer intensive sustained poses. To begin with, painting in the life room would result in many one-day oil studies. As the course progressed it was possible to work on poses for around a two-week period. It was only towards the final year that I had the opportunity to work on poses over a much longer time-scale. These poses were set to last over an entire term.

This was to become a turning point in my own practice, for when approaching a painting over a three-month period there are many things that have to be considered that may not be as obvious when working on a short pose. Not only does the pose have to be as comfortable as possible for your model (no pose is comfortable in the long term) but you will become aware of how techniques in paint application may arise as you work on the same piece over several days in a row.

Setting up

When preparing for a sustained pose, great consideration needs to be

given to the sort of pose you will be asking your model to hold over many hours, days or weeks. Through discussing your ideas, any experienced model will be able to tell what will and won't be possible. It is always a good idea to make drawings and studies of the pose and composition, as while you are doing this, your model will be able to work out how possible the intended pose will be.

During this preparation period your model will be able to make any fine adjustments that are required: perhaps extra padding will be needed to support a part of the body, or the position of cushions and pillows re-adjusted.

As you will be returning to the pose, it is important to mark not only the position of the model in the pose, but to also reference your position to him or her. Placing a chalk mark where your feet are, or a bit of masking tape by your stool legs will suffice. If this isn't possible note your position in relation to other things within the room. You may find you are lining up with the edge of a window or door frame, a picture on the wall, or there may be a grid-like structure of either floor or ceiling tiles. These can be used to double-check your position in relation to both the room and that of your model.

Work out how often your model will need a break – normally a break after an hour or so is to be expected. Working in cycles of forty-five minutes in the pose with a break of fifteen minutes works well, allowing your model to have regular breaks within a structured format.

Once the pose has been set up, before your model breaks do make sure that the model's position has been marked on the drape, floor or chair. This can be done using white chalk, charcoal or masking tape to pinpoint important junctions or places. These may be the position of a foot, the height of the hip or the placing of a shoulder.

It is important to note that however well a pose has been marked up there will be subtle changes once the model returns to the pose. Make sure that you return to the correct position and be aware that drapes

may move as the model comes out of the pose. It takes time for the muscles to relax back into the position, so allow for this when returning to the painting. Using a number of verticals and horizontals will help you to see how different parts of the body line up with each other. Establish these lines on your drawing or canvas so that they can be used as references each time you return to the painting.

Your model should be the best judge of how the pose feels and looks, but sometimes a little help is needed to return to a particularly tricky position. Don't fall into the trap of trying to match up the pose with an incorrect drawing, however.

Each session will provide different challenges; the light will vary unless you are working totally under artificial lighting. If the pose changes drastically you will need to correct your model, but otherwise work with what is there that day and paint what you are then seeing. Revisions will need to be made continually throughout your practice, as areas and colours will need to be re-worked. Continual revision is all part of working with the sustained pose.

As you are working from observation it is important that your model is present for each sitting, and throughout the whole session. Each colour/tone that you perceive is influenced by, and determined by, all the surrounding tonal and chromatic relationships. Students are often 'caught' when once the model has left, carrying on painting the background, drapes, walls, etc. Once the subject of your painting has departed, these relationships are therefore changed. If you carry on working with an essential part of your composition missing, the painting becomes 'invented', and this is quite different from working from life, from observation and perception. You may feel that you can paint the wall when the model isn't there, and then concentrate on the model when she or he is present, but try not to do this, as it really doesn't save you any time.

EXERCISES

In the following section, three paintings will be discussed as each develops step-by-step. Each painting will demonstrate a very different pose type, one from each of the groups: seated, standing and reclining. Each stage of these three featured paintings will be discussed in depth, describing all steps from the initial drawing, establishing the first layers of paint through to the final sitting with the model.

All of these paintings have been made over a sustained period, either over an intensive number of days, for example a five-day pose, or during a sitting each week over many months such as *Tranquillity*.

The seated nude

The Bather

The first exercise works from a seated female model. Here we see how a closer viewpoint is used; the figure fills the pictorial space – there isn't much space around the figure. A high viewpoint has also been used – the model is seated on a low stool, the artist is standing and positioned quite close –which results in a dramatic viewpoint as the eye-level is raised.

This painting was worked on over a five-day period, during a very warm summer. The drying times were therefore influenced by these factors and the thinly applied under-painting over the first two days tended to dry quickly. To begin with, working over paint applied the day before wasn't a problem. This painting was photographed at the end of each day's work or at a useful point during the painting's progression.

Some additions were made to the usual extended palette, so the

colours laid out on the palette this time are:

Titanium White
Cadmium Lemon
Cadmium Yellow
Raw Sienna
Burnt Sienna
Cadmium Red
Alizarin Crimson
Cerulean Blue
French Ultramarine
Terre Verte

The model's darker skin tone is warm and having painted her on previous occasions I found burnt sienna to be a useful addition to the palette. The light within the studio was bright; the pale cerulean colour of the floor with the amount of light bouncing around the studio makes the composition as a whole light and cool. Cerulean blue along with terre verte were selected in response to the colours within the space.

This first image shows initial measuring and the marking of each of these measurements onto the canvas. Dilute paint with brush is used to draw from the very beginning of the painting. Terre verte was selected to make these first marks and to establish the underlying drawing as a fair amount of green could be seen in the flesh tones and in the space around the seated figure. *Terre verte* is a transparent pigment and its warm tone when on the canvas doesn't distract the eye or hinder as other colour areas are added and used for blocking-out. Using the white of the canvas also helps to give the first thin layers of paint brightness and luminosity.



Initial measuring and establishing the scale.

These first marks made onto the canvas surface show the establishing of the scale of the figure. The length of the head has been used for this scale and it is possible to see the number of units that

have been transferred in both the length and width of the composition. The head length fits into the height of the figure four-and-a-half times, and into the width three times. The central line that runs through the figure has been marked onto the canvas using pencil (to give a reference point during the start). Other important lines to be established are the diagonals of the arm, the angle of the floor plane and the axis through the shoulders.





Drawing of the figure in *terre verte*.

In this image the overall shape of the figure remains as a white negative shape while a dilute wash has been used to block-out the tone of the floor. Drawing of the figure continues with a brush and a dilute *terre verte* is thinly applied. To begin the layering process, it was decided to paint a thin wash of terre verte over the entire area as a base for the other colours to be added over the top once it is dry. To do this the brushwork is rapid and fluid; flecks of the white canvas are allowed to show through.

Once the under-painting was dry enough, a mix of opaque cerulean and white was painted over the green ground. The under-painting was thin and, combined with the temperature of the studio and the paint being absorbed into the surface, this first layer was touch dry after being left overnight.

The layer of cerulean is close in tone to the layer of *terre verte;* where the green is allowed to show through a vibration is created as the two colours sit side by side. As the floor plane becomes a little more established attention returns to the drawing of the figure. The model in this seated pose is positioned low down, and I was standing to paint; this gives a high eye level far above the top of the model's head. This means that for each measurement and angle I am looking down at the model. As a result of this high eye level, the angles through the shoulders, back of waist and pelvis are steeper than if the eye-level had been lower. This viewpoint also allows the viewer to see more into the lap and forearms.



A dilute layer of paint is placed over the floor.

The drawing of the dominant shapes and angles of the figure were developed further with dilute green as before. When parts of this drawing became confused with the other under-painting, a dilute

wash of raw sienna was used to continue instead.

As the drawing of the figure continues using raw sienna, the position of the arm and hand is established. The triangle created by the angles from knee to hip, hip to shoulder and shoulder back across to the knee is a useful reference when returning to the pose. Check that the angles of the triangle are the same, and that the negative shape between the shoulder and knee is of the same proportion.



Raw sienna is used to continue the drawing of the figure.

The tone of the background beyond the edge of the floor plane is painted next. It is warmer in colour than the floor and so was thought to be a useful element to have in the picture before beginning to lay down patches of colour on the figure. This isn't an area of flat colour, but under close inspection it is a number of smaller patches of colour, close in tone with slight temperature changes to create a patchwork effect. Where patches overlap slightly, under-painting shows through and in a few places the white canvas continues to be visible.

The time has come to begin patching areas of colour over the figure. But before colour mixing begins for the skin, the darker tone of the drape is established. This dark reference can then be used to compare with all other dark mixes as you go. Without this area of dark tone, or indeed the darkest tone within the composition being identified it is very easy to make the entire tonal range of the painting too light. As with the areas of colour within the background this dark tone has been made by patching small areas of colour over the surface, next to each other rather than with one flat area of colour.



Patching-in of colour over the upper arm.

In preparing to paint the figure a number of tones are mixed beforehand on the palette: light to dark, warm and cool. As these begin to be applied, in the same way as elsewhere on the canvas make

sure that the colour areas remain ‘open’ and loose. Don’t let the work on the figure become too tight too soon. As you begin to add shapes of colour simplify them so that a ‘slab’ of colour describes as much as possible. It is always a temptation to put in too much information far too soon. The following image demonstrates how one area of colour describes the shape of the shoulder and also shows the edge and placing of the shoulder blade. Another colour patch is placed over the side of the ribcage and down over the hip, while another is used over the lower leg and thigh. The paint continues to be opaque and is applied so that the paint itself isn’t transparent but the brushwork itself allows some under-painting to show through. It is the speed of the brushwork applying the paint that gives it this depth.



Patching-in continues over the figure.

There is further drawing at the point where elbow, hip and side of the breast meet and this is done with burnt sienna to distinguish it clearly from other marks around it. This colour has been used

elsewhere to make some of the decisions stand out a little more clearly.

As work progresses, the attention to each transition of colour and tonal variation becomes more focused and analytical. The greater the number of colours on the painting, the more information you have to compare other colour-mixes. As you mix, for example, a red, let your eye scan the entire surface looking at the temperature and tone of similar mixes. You can then begin to judge how the colour you are mixing relates to those around it. Does it need to be warmer or cooler, redder, or perhaps with a hint more mauve?

As more colours are added, for example over the hip, you can see how the tones of the colours being used here are very close to each other. There is a separation between the colours, with a clear border to each colour patch. At no stage are these colour areas blended into each other. If the edges of each area of colour remain, however subtle this may be, the small facets and planes being created will begin to describe the form, enabling it to become more three-dimensional.



All the surface is covered with an opaque mix.

Now more tonal variation is created in the background area immediately around the figure.

By now most of the canvas has been painted to some extent,

whether thin under-painting or a more opaque covering. However, there are still many places that have a small touch of the white showing through, brightening the colour next to it where this occurs. As more paint is added on the figure, the shapes of colour continue to be as simplified as possible. In some places small scratch marks can be seen in the paint where the other end of the brush has been used to refine any drawing, or to remind myself of the position of the edge of a plane of colour.

As more colour areas are added, consideration is always given to the underlying structure of the figure. It is constantly ‘present’. As colour was placed on the back, the line of the spine is always evident as the edges of each colour describe the line of the structure lying beneath. In the same way the shoulder blades are also described.

As more colour is applied over the background, greater attention is given to the variation of dark to light, and warm to cool within the blue area. The paint is applied in the same way as earlier on, so that the loose and rapid movement of the brush-strokes continues to allow small fragments of the under-painting to peep through. This allows the colour to shift subtly from one area to the next. The consistency of the paint is now more buttery as less turpentine is being added to the colour mix while more oil is introduced. This of course will make the drying time slower as the paint surface becomes thicker.



Areas of colour become more refined.

You can see how a decision has finally been made about the height of the diagonal in the background. As a result of this, more paint is layered over the area to build up the colour and makes it richer. From

this point on, this element in the painting becomes troublesome, as both the warmth of the background and the position at which the diagonal cuts through the head, feel unsettled and uncertain.

Elsewhere, within the composition the paint and colours continue to build up over the figure and the floor. Along the model's back, linear drawing picks out the structure of the spine a little more, and in other areas such as the underneath of the shoulder blade and base of the ribcage. Although not wanting them to become too detailed or defined, the main lines of the sandals are drawn in, as is the small tattoo of a cross at the base of her neck.



Cool mauves and pinks are established.

As the end of the pose is in sight, areas such as the hand, arm and the area around the elbow are looked at more closely. Seeing the shape of the extended hand in this position, has made it more

straightforward to simplify it and see it as areas of tone; one colour is swept over the fingers and thumb, while another is placed over the back of the hand. The dark negative space between thumb and index finger is used to delineate the overall shape of the hand.

A little more colour is added throughout the composition, in particular the mauves, pinks and deep orange of the arm, shoulder and on the back.





A detail of a section of the back.

A section of the back is seen in close-up. It is possible to see how each colour shape is painted quite broadly as the edges of each remain unblended, showing the subtle transition of one colour to the next without any sudden jump from one to another.

During this final session the shapes of the sandals were picked out a little more deliberately. While working in this area more definition was needed on the drape placed over the stool in order to make the shape and form read more clearly. These patches of colour still remain quite abstract, and the aim is to keep this area fluid and open in terms of brushwork.



Further work on the drape.

The last images show a dramatic change to the background. As the diagonal became more defined I felt that it didn't work and was unsure of how to change it. I decided to paint out the angle altogether,

to see how this affected the composition. The images show the starting point of the over-painting, and where the painting is now. A steep diagonal on either side of the figure was introduced, which aims to keep the eye within the framework of the composition rather than being carried away by the dominant line that was there previously. The space beyond the figure still remains undecided but I feel that its ambiguity works more successfully than the enclosed space created by the strongly defined diagonal that was previously present.



Re-painting the background.

The standing nude

It is unusual to find someone who is willing to hold a standing pose over a sustained period because it is incredibly demanding on the model.

A standing pose once marked up can be quite straightforward to resume, as there are no props or studio furniture to worry about. A model attempting a standing pose needs to be experienced; a great deal of stamina is needed as well as being aware of how your body responds when holding an unsupported pose. An experienced model will know how to tense and relax muscles in various parts of the body, all while the pose continues. The model will know when to come out of the pose safely, before any damage can be done, rather than holding the pose for too long in one stretch or because the session is nearly over.



The final session.



The Bather.

Euan Uglow

Euan Uglow painted a number of incredibly complex standing sustained poses. *Zagi* (1981–82) is a large-scale nude now in the Tate Gallery. Here the model is shown standing in profile, her arms outstretched in front of her at a right angle to her torso. A vertical line runs from the top of her head ending at the back of her front heel. Her right leg is stretched out behind her creating a diagonal from hip to toe. The model's arms have been supported by a handle on the wall; she grasps it and her arms remain strong in the pose.

The transitions of colour are striking as you look down through the pose. Her torso is described predominantly in yellows and cool oranges but as the eye moves further down the pose red becomes more dominant. At first the thighs are a cool mauve and crimson but the lower legs and feet are a much brighter and warmer red as the blood settles in the legs over the duration of a long sitting.

The striding nude features in a number of Uglow's paintings: *Large Nude Walking Towards You* (1971), *Jenefer by a Door* (1971–74) and *Striding Nude, Blue Dress, II*(1978–81) all show a female figure in a striding yet static pose.

The painting *Snake* is a small work painted using a limited palette. A dominant vertical has been placed down the centre of the composition. To its right a figure stands on a platform with her arms wrapped around her shoulders. The tension and shape of the pose are seen beautifully against the vertical as the line snakes along the curves and structures of the body.

Standing Nude

This painting of a sustained standing pose was worked on over a five-

day period. The model in this picture is very experienced at holding continuous poses such as this standing *contrapposto* position.

The *contrapposto* pose creates a beautiful line as an elongated curve runs down through the body, from the head, along the line of the spine, continuing through the pelvis and down the extended leg. A sense of movement is created as the shoulders drop down to one side and the pelvis drops in the opposite direction creating a curve through the spine. The weight of the figure is borne through the straight leg. The angles of this pose create many challenges when drawing to achieve a feeling of weight and structure of the standing figure.

Contrapposto

The Italian term *contrapposto*, meaning 'to set against', was used to describe poses where one part twists or turns away from another. The term was used during the Renaissance to describe the relaxed asymmetrical poses from antiquity, poses characteristic of the sculpture of Ancient Greece and Rome. Two very well known examples that demonstrate this type of pose perfectly are the Classical Greek sculpture of Aphrodite known as the *Venus de Milo* and Michelangelo's *David. Contrapposto* may apply to painting as well as sculpture.

The colours on the palette for the duration of this painting are:

Titanium White
Cadmium Lemon
Cadmium Yellow
Raw Sienna
Cadmium Red

Alizarin Crimson
Cerulean Blue
French Ultramarine

This is the extended palette used for most of the demonstration paintings throughout this book. A few other colours were added to the palette as they were thought to be useful because of the dark warm tones of the model's skin. When painting her on previous occasions Indian red and viridian had been helpful and although burnt sienna had been added to begin with it didn't give the required warmth and intensity to the mixes.



Number of head measurements are marked up on the surface.

The image above shows how the initial measuring and drawing were established on the surface of the canvas. The length of the head was used as a unit of measurement throughout the entire figure and

composition. The head when measured on the vertical, from the top of the head to the chin, fits into the total length of the pose six and a half times. This measurement was checked, and double-checked before the unit lengths were marked along the vertical down the centre of the canvas.

You can see how lines are placed in the centre of the canvas to mark the number of head-lengths from head to toe. Once these points have been established, small marks are placed at the same height along the left-hand side of the canvas. This is done so that when the centrally placed measurements may be covered over as the painting develops, there is still a scale to refer back to.

There is also a centrally placed horizontal. This line marks the position of both the centre of the canvas, and also the half-way point on the height of the figure. The distance from head to hip and hip to foot are equal. It is possible to see a small amount of adjustment in the position of the line, as this proportion was matched up with the scale of head units measuring into the pose.

These first marks are made with oil paint placed directly onto the canvas with a fine rigger brush. The pigment being used is unbleached titanium white, as when it is diluted it is a sympathetic colour to work with. It is light in tone, and it doesn't dominate or stand out too strongly when other colours are being patched-in around it.



As the drawing is established, background areas are patched-in around the figure.

Once these initial markers of scale have been established attention is then given to the blocking-out of the background. Firstly a thin wash is added in the top left section of the composition. As the white is slowly covered, it is this tone immediately around the figure which will help to judge the tonal values of the skin against it rather than any white.

As the paint is applied the brushwork is rapid to allow small glints of white to still appear through the under-painting, so that the colour doesn't become too flat. This method of application continues to be used when blocking-in any large shapes of colour during this early stage.

This second image shows how the background areas continue to be patched-in around the figure. The outline of the figure is established as areas of colour are blocked-in around it. As the model settles into the pose there will be minute adjustments in her position, so this approach of loosely applying colour around her keeps the position more fluid.

The space around the figure begins to be divided up; verticals, horizontals and the edge of the floor plane are established; the figure begins to be placed within an environment. The cool green-blue is added, and the paint remains quite thin and dilute at this stage.

A screen was placed behind the standing figure. This was done for two reasons: firstly to provide a number of verticals within the composition and to give a backdrop colour which would be of more interest than the clutter in the corner of the studio.

Drying times

When we work using oil paints the drying times can cause problems. If we have a session each week with a model, in a class situation for example, then the painting in progress will dry between sittings. As we work with one sitting after another during a five-day pose such as this we don't have any drying time in between. Working wet paint over wet paint can become problematic.

As you work, remember the 'fat over lean' principle: begin by adding dilute thin layers and gradually build up the thickness of the paint in subsequent applications.

Some pigments will dry more quickly than others and the time of year, level of humidity, type of surface you are using, etc., will also influence the speed at which your paint will dry, or not!

Removing paint

As the paint surface builds up over a number of consecutive days you will find that the paint remains wet and sticky. Laying down paint over such an area will be difficult. If paint is over-brushed, the top layer will mix with the wet paint underneath and this can result in the colour becoming muddy or chalky. There are ways to manage this if you find that the paint is mixing too much.

The first thing you could try is a technique called 'tonking'. Take a small piece of clean kitchen towel or plain newsprint. Carefully lay the piece of absorbent tissue over the area you wish to work on. Hold it in place with one hand, and with the other carefully rub the surface, without letting the paper move. Once this is done, remove it with care and you will see that the medium from the paint will have been removed. You can do this

a number of times until there is nothing on the tissue. Remember to use a clean piece of tissue each time to stop any colour transferring to where it shouldn't. Once you have done this you may find that it is easier to work over the top as long as you use a minimum of brushstrokes and apply paint that is thicker in consistency than the earlier layers.

The other approach is to carefully scrape off the paint if it isn't too large an area. You can do this with a small palette knife, or a rounded scalpel blade works very well. You only need to remove the topmost layer of paint: do be careful that you don't remove too much and damage the primed surface.

Secondly, when dropping verticals through the pose at various points the relative positions of body parts in relation to each other can be determined. It was noted that all the lines running through the pose were diagonals to some degree. The verticals provided by the screen would give some 'stability' to the composition and counteract all the different angles.

The verticals also help to check that the model is in the correct position, and that the tilt of the pelvis returns to the same position. As you look at the figure, the left hip touches the second vertical in from the left of the screen. The central vertical is seen just appearing to the left of the neck. The next vertical cuts through the right shoulder at a certain point. You can see how useful it is to note the relationship of these verticals in relation to the figure. When returning to the pose after a break you can use these reference points to check the model's position, and importantly your position in relation to her.

Once the verticals of the screen have been placed within the painting, further drawing of the figure continues. The angle of each structure of the body now added; spine, shoulders, pelvis, knees and the angle through the feet are all useful references as the drawing

progresses. Other lines then begin to delineate the form and shape of the hip, abdomen and rib cage.

Once the main angles of the pose have been established, there is further drawing to the figure during this next stage. A standing pose needs to be grounded with the legs firmly anchored, supporting the weight of the figure. The front leg here relaxes as the back leg takes the body's weight. Measurements are checked thoroughly once more as the drawing of the figure continues to develop.



Establishing the angles of the figure.

The drawing of the figure concentrates on the essential angles, placing of structures and looking at the scale and proportion of the negative shapes and spaces around the form.



Patching-in colours around the figure.

Before work begins on mixing the first flesh tones, patches of colour for the drapes on the floor were added. This is done before the skin because of how the intensity and saturation of these colours will

influence all other colours within the painting, so it was decided to put them in sooner rather than later.

Because these pigments (red and green) are transparent in nature, it is therefore necessary to build up these areas of colour with several layers to be able to create the level of saturation needed.

The darkest tone in the composition is the dark panel in the top half of the canvas on the right-hand side. This was painted at this stage so that all the tones of the figure, in particular the darker tones of the skin could be judged against this dark area. A light blue mix is then scumbled over the first layer of green-blue on the right section of the floor.



Areas of colour begin to be added over the figure.

As all the other areas of the composition have now been blocked-in, it is time to begin to make a series of mixes for the skin. The model's skin is dark in tone, and warm in temperature.

The paint being applied is diluted a little with a small amount of turpentine, but the paint still remains opaque when placed on the canvas. The areas of colour being patched in are fairly large, with each describing as much of a part of the figure as possible. In the image above you can see how two tones have been laid down next to each other. When initially blocking-in any part of the figure, try not to add too many colours or changes in tone. Too many small patches of colour can make the form become fragmented. This is the under-painting and more information may be added during the following layers.

The lines that describe structures of the body, or changes in direction of the figure in the initial drawing are helpful as they indicate where the edge of one of these colour planes actually finishes, or where the next patch of colour begins. These areas are greatly simplified as can be seen with the patching-in of colour over the head and shoulder area.

By now the tonal relationships over the majority of the figure have been added, taking one colour plane right up to the edge of the next so that little white now remains throughout the composition as a whole.



Further attention is given to warm and cool contrasts as the surface is covered.

The cooler areas have been established, as the danger with this range of mixes is that the skin colours can become overly hot in

temperature. This is where the cooler and lighter tones of the background become useful as they help the eye to link with the cooler areas within the skin. Further drawing continues, using mixed colour over the underlying colour. These coloured lines either re-define the original drawing where some of it may have been lost as colour has been patched-in or further accentuate and pick out other body shapes and structures. This can be seen where drawing with a dark mix of Indian red is used to suggest the form of the abdomen and to correct the curve of the breasts, collarbone and angles of the muscles as they run up the neck. The same colour has been used to establish the position and shape of the jaw-line and ear.

In the areas surrounding the figure further paint is added; smaller colour patches are painted on the floor while in the distance, by the screen the tone of the floor becomes darker. The angles of the floor-plane beyond the screen have been changed which makes the screen move forward in space. Each of the rectangles of the screen picks up a slightly different hue as each section reflects light slightly differently. The cool greens, greys and mauves are layered over the previous colour and as the rapidly applied paint-strokes are placed they allow small fragments of colour to show through. It isn't intended to be a flat opaque layer so the paint continues to be applied in this way, with a fluid and sketchy stroke.

During the previous session most of the work concentrated on the skin's tone and colour. Looking at the painting following the end of this session I thought that the colours of the skin were now too light overall, so the first thing during this next sitting was to re-establish the darker tones that had been lost. These dark and rich colours were re-mixed and patches were then added over the right side of the abdomen, upper arms, both thighs and lower legs. With these warmer areas re-painted, other areas close to them needed to become darker.

It was felt that the cool and lighter areas were still too warm; these would be worked on during a subsequent session. The dark tones of

the model's hair are now painted. This is the last remaining area of dark to be added. Immediately this makes the tones of the head look quite different so these also need to be revised.

The left side of the screen had up until now been very light in tone. Although there is an area of brightness in the top left of the picture the lower section to the left of the screen needed to become much darker. As the paint was laid down it was applied with quite a rapid movement so that there is speed and energy in the marks. This stops the area of tone becoming overly flat, with some of the colour underneath still peeping through.

Once this dark area has been established, its immediate effect is to create space and depth beyond and around the screen. The screen is pushed towards the background, but the space between the standing figure and the screen has become more believable. You can also begin to read space beyond the screen.

To the right side of the screen the angle of the floor-plane has been changed, as the line of the cupboards placed on a diagonal further helps the space behind the screen to be read. As the angles close to the screen have been changed more paint is then added to the most distant area of floor making it darker in tone in order to make it recede. On the right hand side it is perhaps a little too dark but more paint can be layered over at a later stage.



Re-establishing the darker tones of the figure and the surrounding area.

As more colour is layered over the drapes beneath the model's feet, the colour becomes richer and more saturated. The green mixes are

transparent as is the red mix before any white is added so a number of layers are needed to allow the colour to become resonant enough.

At this stage some areas of the figure are simplified. Some of the areas were previously over-detailed for this stage in the painting process. You can see how in the area over the chest the patches of colour are now more opaque, and each colour covers a slightly larger area. The light section above the left breast is made warmer as more yellow is added to the mix. The paint surface also builds up over the legs as patches of colour begin to describe the form and modelling of the contours. Over these areas lines of mixed colour will be used to accentuate or pick out any further drawing.



Simplifying some of the colour areas on the figure.

It is not intended that the painting of the face should be too detailed, as the scale of the head within the picture is relatively small, but there still needs to be enough information to make it read as a

head. A small light-coloured brush-stroke indicates the position of the cheekbone and a curve suggests the area underneath the eye, the plane moving away from us towards the turn of the side of her nose. These areas are very small and in many instances one mark is enough. A small round brush was used for this area of the painting.

The image overleaf shows how there is now more modelling over the whole form. Small planes of colour have been painted over the more broadly painted areas done last session. The colour is now becoming much richer as the surface continues to build up with thicker layers of paint. Small patches of colour describe the form of the shoulders, breasts and hips, while small adjustments continue to be made over the whole figure – minute changes in colour and colour temperature to describe the turns and shapes of the body.



Further modelling over the form.

Further layers are also added to the pieces of coloured cloth placed on the floor. Subtle adjustments in tone have been made to suggest angles, folds, light and shadow upon the surface.

Paint is now scumbled over the floor area as the transition from light to darker tones was too abrupt. The paint is layered in a similar way, with a rapid and gestural stroke so that the colours begin to shimmer with light. The transition from one tone to the next is now subtler than before.



A close-up of the torso and pelvis.

The detail shows a close-up of the torso and pelvis. In this image it is possible to see how the small patches of colour have been built up, smaller patches placed over larger areas of under-painting. It is possible to see how these small areas of colour sit next to one another, often with very subtle transitions of colour and temperature. However subtle the edge of each colour plane is left, it is not blended. However wet you may find the paint, do try to keep the edge of each colour patch as this will help to describe the contour of the figure and its three dimensions.

As the paint surface continues to be built up over the five-day pose, paint has been added in smaller and smaller patches. It is possible to see in this later stage of the painting that the presence of drawing is still evident over the patches of colour. Lines of different colours are present over the surface to delineate surface anatomy under the skin, for example, the junction where two or more planes meet or to emphasize a particular structure. As you do this select a suitable colour, i.e. one that will stand out but will work with those around it.

Looking closely at the painting, it is still possible to see some of the initial measurement marks. Some of these will have been painted out during the process, not intentionally but it happens as more paint is added. The marks that remain will stay as they are all part of the painting process and tell the history of the painting's progression.



Standing Nude.

During the later sittings, further attention has been given to the cool colours of the skin. These highlights, sometimes very vivid mauves and turquoises, are visible but they are only seen for a short time during a part of the session and then disappear as the light

changes. I had to wait for these to return, and then place them along the collarbone, side of breast and on top of her abdomen.

Changing light throughout a sustained pose is inevitable. Unless you are setting up a pose under artificial light and have blocked out all natural light, as Lucian Freud did in his studio, then you will be battling subtle changes as you progress. This will be particularly noticeable if you are working with a model over an entire day rather than a shorter session. Morning and afternoon lights are very different and light reflecting from something else can be troublesome. There may be some times of day when you will develop one area of the painting, and wait for another time to work on others.

Changing light can dramatically affect colour temperature. Make sure that there is no direct sunlight on the figure, and if reflections are the problem, find the source. Use blinds or use white tissue on windows to diffuse light if need be. Even northern light can be a little changeable if there is something outside which reflects the sun.

The reclining nude

The last paintings in this chapter show two contrasting reclining poses. One pose is of a more curled and rhythmic position which is painted with a warmer range of mixes on the palette while the other is an elegantly elongated pose using a cooler range of colours.



Tranquillity.

Sleeping Nude

The palette used for this exercise was:

Titanium White
Cadmium Lemon
Cadmium Yellow
Raw Sienna
Burnt Sienna
Cadmium Red
Alizarin Crimson

Terre Verte
Cerulean Blue
French Ultramarine

This painting *Sleeping Nude* was made in response to the earlier painting *Tranquillity*, which shows a pose that is both extended and elongated. The pose of *Sleeping Nude* is a more curled and twisted position, which contrasts to the extension of the reclining pose of *Tranquillity*. Throughout its duration, this painting of the reclining nude was worked on intensively over a number of weekends rather than being painted over a more continuous sustained period.

The position of the figure is established once again by drawing with a dilute wash of raw umber and a rigger brush. When first examining how the figure fitted within the rectangle it was noted that the navel was placed in the very centre of the canvas on the horizontal and it is just above the central position on the vertical. Although in this painting the figure is placed on a diagonal, all measuring is made along the horizontal and vertical axes as before. The length of the head is used as a unit of measurement, and this when measured along the horizontal fits four times along the length of the pose: top of head to chin; chin to the line under the top breast; breast to pubic bone; and pubic bone to knee. As the lower legs and feet are tucked back behind the thighs this makes the measurement from knee to toe only half of a head-length.



The composition of the painting is established.



Colour areas are patched-in over the whole surface.

Along the vertical, the measurement of the head fits twice into the height of the pose, from top of shoulder to underarm, and underarm to elbow. It is worth noting that the top of the head and shoulder are in line, as if a horizontal line is connecting the two points. When working on any reclining pose, do look out for relationships such as these, where two or three points stack up along either a horizontal or vertical line. These relationships are helpful when setting up the pose each time following a break. If when returning to the pose the top of the head and the shoulder are no longer in line then I will know that the pose has changed in some way. The negative shapes around the body in a pose such as this are also very helpful markers when re-setting a pose, and also helpful when checking your position in

relation to the model.

Once the position of the figure has been placed within the rectangle, the background areas around the figure are covered with a rapidly applied wash of colour. Three tones are mixed on the palette so that the light to dark tonal range is established from the beginning. You can see how fluid the brushwork is in the first image. On the figure itself, large patches of colour describe the form, tones are light and these patches respond to warm and cool temperature changes.

In this second image of the *Sleeping Nude* it is possible to see how the colour has now been patched in over the entire canvas surface. By the end of this session with the model there are only a few areas of bare canvas remaining, although there are many places where there are glints of white which show through, in between the quickly applied colour patches that have been blocked in with fluid brushwork.

Drawing now continues as parts of the figure are further defined and established and the initial drawing is checked and rechecked all the way through this stage. Mixed colour is used to delineate areas and also to accent any shapes and measurements which may have become lost during the initial blockingin.



The dark-to-light relationship is established during the following sessions.

These patches of colour are applied broadly, particularly when painting in the drape and background. Although the areas are painted with sketchy and fluid brushwork, the shapes are established from the beginning to describe the form of the structure underneath which is supporting the reclining figure.

As measuring continues alongside the patching-in of colour, vertical and horizontal lines are used to check the position of one part of the body to another. Three verticals can be clearly seen: one cutting through the breast and just above the elbow, another through the wrist-bone to groin, and a third line which cuts through both knees. These lines are obvious for the moment as they are to be used as a

reminder, to check that these relationships remain once the model returns to the pose after a break.

Colour continues to be applied in a painterly manner and the edges of each colour shape are used to describe how the planes of the body turn and move around the form. These planes have been simplified as much as possible: the upper arm has been painted using one colour; the top thigh has been established with two patches of colour and begins to suggest light and dark; and the model's face is blocked in with one colour.

Smaller colour patches are used, which begin to divide up the complicated form of the torso, but the aim is still to simplify the shapes of light and dark as much as possible. Don't try to put too much information in too soon. So much of working on a sustained pose is about being able to plan step-by-step rather than trying to have all colours and tones present from the beginning. During these very early stages I have begun to analyse and suggest warm and cool temperature relationships alongside light and dark.

The image above shows how the painting has developed during two more days of work. The paint has been applied more thickly and is buttery in consistency; the colours are becoming brighter and are now more saturated. Although there is greater definition of the structures and shapes of the body, the colour patches still remain as simplified as possible. There is just enough variation of tone within each colour area for these edges to describe the contour of the body. For example, take a look at the lower knee in the painting. It is viewed as a box-shaped structure and so to describe each plane, or each side of the 'box', three patches of colour have been placed: a cool light on the side of the knee (seen at the top); a warmer red on the top of the knee (which is facing us); and a cool green which moves down from the knee to the front of the shin. Lines are established over the top of these colour areas that further draw and accentuate the underneath structure and show each change of direction of the planes.

Maintaining a pose

Sometimes the pose may appear to change from one sitting to the next. How much of this is due to the model changing position and muscles relaxing, and how much may be due to incorrect drawing on the artist's part at the beginning? You will have to decide what to change and what to leave as it is.

During a sustained pose things are going to change, no matter what. Over the duration of a long sitting muscles will inevitably begin to relax into the pose, so outlines and negative shapes may need minor adjustment as you progress. Remember how painful a continuous pose is going to be for your model; even with regular breaks the muscles will not have enough time to recover before the model resumes the pose, sometimes even on the following day.

We can only try to get the pose as close as possible each time; marking on drapes, for example, will help to do this. Most importantly your model will be the best judge as to whether the pose feels right or not.

We constantly have to adapt as we work but it is a waste of time to try and correct every time something changes slightly. Positions and relationships of things will most likely return at some stage and it will then be possible to go back to that area of the painting. Reclining poses in particular can be difficult to get exactly right each time. Even if your model feels as if they are in the correct pose, any cushions, pillows and drapes underneath them that support the pose will change and flatten during a session. Do bear this in mind when re-setting the pose each time.



Work concentrates on the head and the front arm.



Attention is given to the painting of the torso and head.

Over the shoulders and chest, simplified but smaller shapes of colour begin to describe the form, shape by shape, all sitting together in the fashion of a patchwork. When doing this do be careful that the edges of each colour area are not lost or smoothed out as fresh paint is being applied. The colour is not blended and it is important to try and keep the separation of one colour area next to another as paint is added to the surface. If any of these edges are missing the form can become flat and the contour of the form may be lost.

The most complicated area is the torso, with the subtle movement around the ribcage being suggested as shadows describe the structures underneath. Colour patches over this area are smaller than elsewhere on the body for the moment, to help describe and understand the

formation and structure of the torso.

The head, like the figure, has been simplified to planes of light and shade to describe its three dimensions and it is constructed in the same way with patches of colour. The focus at this stage is to establish the proportions and structure of the head without worrying about 'making a likeness'.

The mirror that is placed behind the figure has now been blocked in. The back of the hip and thigh as seen in the reflection are darker in tone, and are quite different to the tones of the front of the figure. Lines have been added over the surface of the drape to show where the planes of light and shadow will be once these tones have been patched in.



A close-up of the head and thorax.

It is possible to see a line running from the top edge of the shoulder, torso and hip – with very subtle movement and with changes happening throughout the sittings there is indecision as to where this edge is finally going to be. So therefore a line has been put there to serve as a reminder of where the shape may need to be adjusted. The line remains for now so that during a later sitting and with further measuring, a decision will then be made on the position of the edge.

Much of the work throughout the following day's painting is concentrated on the head and the extended arm in the foreground. The features begin to take shape as patches of colour, light and dark, begin to describe the contours and shape of the head. Apart from the light triangle of the nose and patch of light on her forehead, cheekbone and chin, the rest of the model's face is dark in tone.

Most of the darker tones within the picture were established during this session. As well as the head, the darks on the neck, lower legs and feet were accentuated.

As the background areas surrounding the figure continue to build up, paint is patched on, resulting in some areas becoming more opaque and appearing flatter, while others are painted with a broader and more expressive stroke so that the colour area still has an energy and vibrancy. The reflection of the figure in the mirror is more defined, as are the planes and facets of the sheet as it falls over the structure that lies underneath.

As the painting progressed it was decided that some of the areas of colour needed to be simplified further: the areas of colour on the forearm, lower thigh and lower legs as well as some of the areas of the drape, which were extended further to create a foundation of colour. During the following session, these would then be modelled with smaller areas of colour to create the subtle transitions of the form.

Drawing with colour continues over the entire surface as adjustments and revisions are carefully made.



Work continues over the whole surface.



Sleeping Nude.

During the final stages of the painting the changes are much less obvious. Drawing is continually adjusted as more colours are added, small patches of colour are placed on the surface and then removed as rapidly as they appeared. The angles of the pose and negative shapes are as important for reference during this stage as they are at the beginning of the drawing.

More paint is added over the background while looking more closely at the shapes and form of the drape around the figure as well as the supporting structure. Tone and colour are continually revised and checked. The colours on the chest and thigh were adjusted and the shape of the breasts refined. A decision is finally made on the shape of the hip and the background colour is used to re-adjust this edge.

As smaller and smaller adjustments are made during the final sittings with the model, you may feel that you are beginning to go round in circles as colours may be added and then removed. It can be

difficult to decide when the painting is finished, or when to make the decision to stop and not do anything further. If you find that you are beginning to fiddle, to do things that are not necessary, stop. Ask yourself what will be achieved if you carry on making minute changes. Listen to your gut feeling and stop when it feels right.

CHAPTER 6

THE NAKED PORTRAIT

What do we mean by a naked portrait and how does this differ from a nude? Where do the boundaries lie between a nude and a naked portrait? Often when we look at paintings of the nude figure, although we see the presence of a model we don't get any further clues of who they are, or have any sense of their personality within the painting. Sometimes painting the nude becomes more about the formal issues of making a painting, of shape, colour, line or form. The painting may be about light falling on the figure or a particular atmosphere, the shape and pose of the model, paint handling or telling a narrative. It isn't about the model. The figure has become a vehicle for all these various elements and in itself has become an abstract concept rather than having a visible character or personality coming through.



Yuki Seated.

The idea of the nude portrait is of a particular interest to me, where a nude and portrait together result in an intensely powerful yet intimate portrayal of the sitter. A nude portrait is not only about

capturing a likeness, or of being just the head or figure, but it is much more about the psychological presence of the model – their mood, emotions and physical presence.

The 'naked portrait' was a phrase used by the late Lucian Freud when referring to a number of his portraits. He felt that when painting the head he could express as much as painting the entire figure. I use the term with quite a different emphasis: to describe paintings of the nude that have a powerful presence of the sitter, or as an unclothed psychological portrait.

The work of a number of artists who painted the figure in this manner is discussed in this next section. Each painter demonstrates both an intensity of scrutiny and directness in their observation of their model. Each of the paintings selected shows an uncompromising integrity and honesty in its execution. In some way each painting powerfully holds the eye of the viewer, and sometimes the gaze of the sitter holds ours. Sometimes the model looks away but there still remains a curiosity and questioning, the model as well as the viewer. Some of these images have a sense of 'grittiness', a rather uncomfortable engagement with the viewer. We can learn something of their personality, of who they are, their thoughts and feelings during the time of the painting.

Painting someone can be a very intimate thing to do, whether clothed or not. Sitting after sitting, you are spending a great deal of time with one another. Whether or not you talk during the sittings, there is a great deal of information that will be communicated while spending this amount of time together. Often placed closely within the studio, whether you know your model very well or whether this is the first time you have painted them, there will be changes of mood and emotions and these will slowly be absorbed into your painting.

The group of paintings described in this chapter feel very contemporary in their nature, and in their execution.

Egon Schiele (1890–1918)

When thinking of ‘naked portraiture’ the works that first spring to mind are the powerful and tormented images of the Austrian Expressionist Egon Schiele. Although Schiele’s life was cut short, dying tragically early at the age of 28, he leaves behind a vast and prolific output. Schiele was a master draftsman and he left behind thousands of works on paper – drawings and watercolours which show his expressive interpretations of the human form. His drawings of the nude show us a beautifully fluid and sensual line.

His lines flow lightly over the form as every sinew and structure is suggested with such a delicacy and softness. (It seems as if the artist used hard grade pencils in these drawings to allow the line to flow lightly without it becoming too heavy or smudged. Lightly feathered strokes tend to be used to describe the internal forms and contours of the figure.) A typical example of one of Schiele’s drawings is *Seated nude, back view* (1912), in the collection of the Historisches Museum de Stadt Wien. This artist’s work is very well represented in the galleries of Vienna, the Albertina in particular, if you wish to see more.

Egon Schiele is best known for his numerous anguished nude self-portraits, in which the artist’s isolation and disorientation is demonstrated. The work *Self-Portrait in Crouching Position* (1913), gouache and pencil (National Museum Stockholm) is very typical of his nude self-portraiture. Here, the artist looks out at us; his limbs are angular and contorted adding to the sense of angst and unrest. The lines and marks he uses are also spiky and angular, which adds to the overall feeling of tension and alienation.

In the self-portrait *Nude Self Portrait, Squatting* (1916) in the Albertina, Vienna, we see a similar pose to that of the 1913 picture. This time, however, the forms are a little less angular. The head falls to one side and the eyes look directly out at us, holding our gaze. This image seems rather less contorted than the earlier 1913 work, and it is much

more tonal with a heavier use of graphite and more contrasting, weightier marks all over the surface. A toned paper is used and colour is placed delicately, contrasting with the bold and accented lines.

Schiele's oil paintings have the same fluid linear quality as his works on paper, but his surfaces become much more textured and layered. In his 1917 oil-on-canvas *Girl (The Virgin)*, private collection, we see a young girl in a simple standing symmetrical pose. She looks directly out at us, her hands dropped by her side with the fingers curled. Here the painter is inspired by classical aesthetic values, in her symmetry, harmony and clarity of form.

The themes of motherhood and of new life were recurrent subjects for Egon Schiele and it was through his drawings and paintings that he could symbolically express his feelings of love and security.

Schiele's *The Family* painted in 1918 (in the Österreichische Galerie, Vienna) is a remarkable painting and is one of his last important works. It can be seen to act as a visual document of the artist's life at this time, as well as demonstrating his evolution as a painter. In this powerful image, Schiele paints his family: the man who is naked sits on a sofa of some kind. He sits on the edge of the sofa with his legs raised, their angles and negative spaces around them remind us of the pose in his earlier crouching and squatting self-portraits. The male figure here is once again a self-portrait. Sitting before him in the space between his raised legs there is a female nude with an infant gripping her legs.

The three figures create a very compact composition and the paint applied on the canvas surface is done with drawn linear brushstrokes. This descriptive brushwork, which is used to depict the family, accentuates the form and the drawing throughout the composition as a whole. In this painting Schiele uses a type of realism we are unaccustomed to seeing in his work.

The male and female figures, along with their toddler who is wrapped in a blanket, stand out boldly against a background that is dark and sombre, and simple and economical in its depiction. This

work contrasts greatly with Schiele's earlier paintings; the naked figures are more sculptural and three-dimensional rather than his usual linear contour being used. The brushwork here when painting the figures creates both a physical volume and presence. The artist's later paintings became much more 'painterly' in their expression and execution.

This late painting is melancholy in its nature as it almost prophesies the artist's own tragic future. The dark tonality of the painting emphasizes this, and the figures' expressions are not exaggerated as we so often see in his earlier work. The male figure holds our gaze, staring straight out of the canvas, while his wife and infant look out to the right of the picture frame.

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959)

The English painter Stanley Spencer painted a number of remarkable and powerful images of the nude. His first naked portrait was *Nude Portrait of Patricia Preece* (1935), now in the Ferens Art Gallery, Kingston upon Hull.

Immediately we see that this is not what we would call a conventional nude. The model is positioned full frontal in a seemingly confrontational pose and she is seen here as totally exposed under an unflattering and harsh light. Her gaze out from the canvas is direct and unsmiling. This is an unflinching portrayal and it would remain so whether we should have eye contact with the sitter or not.

Her flesh is described with great attention to detail: every blemish on the skin is present and veins are individually recorded over her sagging breasts. This honesty to truth we will see again towards the end of the twentieth century in the nudes of Lucian Freud.

In Spencer's 1936 double portrait *Self-Portrait with Patricia Preece* we again are confronted with a raw nakedness of a nature that is rarely

seen before the twentieth century. The artist is placed centrally within the composition; his profile cuts directly over the naked torso of Patricia Preece. The resulting image is a powerful psychological interaction between artist and model. The artist who is also seen naked is seen as a witness or voyeur. In this painting we see the same level of scrutiny as in the detail of *Nude Portrait* of 1935; this time it is intensified due to the nature of the composition and the closeness of the viewpoint of those being observed.

Stanley Spencer's working procedure involved painting directly onto the canvas with preparatory drawing under-pinning the composition. He did not build-up the paint surface in the manner of painting over a broad under-painting. His working practice can be seen in the painting *The Apotheosis of Hilda*. This large scene demonstrates how the artist begins work in the top left-hand corner with an immaculate series of small marks, made with small brushes slowly spreading across the surface of the canvas, patch by patch. Slowly the painting emerges, each patch as complete as that it follows. As the surface is slowly covered the painted area appears to be complete next to the areas of bare canvas that remain.

One of Spencer's most well known images is his *Double Nude Portrait: The Artist and his Second Wife* (1937) in the Tate Gallery, London. The painting is also known as the *Leg of Mutton Nude* and is explicit in its content. The painter Francis Bacon called it 'exhilarated despair'. Both the artist and model, Stanley and Patricia are seen naked, Patricia reclines in the lower half of the composition while the painter shows himself as he squats next to his muse. He looks down at her, placed towards the rear of the composition, naked except for his spectacles. In the foreground is placed a raw leg of mutton and an uncooked lamb chop serving as a reference to the unconsummated relationship of the couple.

This painting doesn't seem to have been exhibited publicly during the artist's lifetime, and it entered the Tate collection in 1974 reviving

Spencer's reputation in the process. The realism of this painting was to influence many young painters around this time, in particular the young Lucian Freud. With its male, female and animal flesh all becoming one within the composition, it is a brave painting in many ways. The closely viewed and cropped figures that draw attention to the genitalia, particularly male, have an incredibly powerful and direct realism.

Gwen John (1876–1939)

Gwen John painted many female portraits during her lifetime; her paintings of women, girls and a series of nuns are very tender and intimate images. Her interest when painting people was of the female figure and she did produce a small number of nudes.

Many of the women we see have featured in more than one painting, as ideas are worked and re-worked. Gwen John's paintings have an incredible intimacy whether the models are clothed or unclothed.

Her *Nude Girl* (1909–10) in the Tate London, shows us a small painting that echoes the same pose as a portrait of the same year *Girl with Bare Shoulders* in MOMA, New York. This small nude is of the model Fenella Lovell and the composition is nearly identical to the clothed portrait, except that in one Fenella is clothed and in the other she is not. It is said that Gwen John intensely disliked the model, which I feel is apparent in the portrait.

In a letter to her friend Ursula Tyrwhitt (postmarked 9 September 1909) she writes: 'It is a great strain doing Fenella. It is a pretty little face but she is dreadful.' In another, sent on 6 May 1910, also to Ursula, Gwen wrote: 'Why I want to send the two paintings (to the New English Art Club) is because I may sell them and then I shall pay her what I owe and never see her again.'[8]

Both paintings were hung in the exhibition, although only one of the portraits was listed, the clothed painting of Fenella. Unfortunately it was not sold and it was returned to Gwen (who was living in Paris at the time) by her brother, the painter Augustus John.

It seems that John's naked portrait of *Nude Girl* did begin with the sitter being clothed but was altered as the painting progressed.

The clothed portrait has a much greater directness than that of the nude portrait, but this small nude has an intensity and unflinching gaze between sitter and viewer. *Nude Girl* stayed in England after the exhibition and it was bought by the Contemporary Art Society in 1911 and later presented to the Tate Gallery in 1917. This was the first of Gwen's paintings to enter a public art collection in the UK.[9]

In another, later painting of a *Seated Nude* (*c*. 1923–24) we see a nude seated girl, but this time we do not have the same directness and intensity that we had under Fenella's gaze; this I feel is one of the main characteristics of a *naked portrait*.

Alice Neel (1900–84)

During the twentieth century the American painter Alice Neel painted some of the most powerful and direct psychological portraits that we now have. Her sitters were mostly people to whom she was very close, whether friends or family, lovers, poets or fellow artists. She did paint strangers, however: people she met on the street, adults and children and family scenes. She was known as a portrait painter throughout her career, and she continued the figurative tradition against the tide of abstract Expressionism which dominated American art during the 1950s.

She produced many fine portraits and nudes that broke new ground in the field of portraiture. Her direct use of paint matched the

directness of her gaze, as her very expressive brushwork and use of colour captured the presence and emotions of her sitters.

There is a wonderful film available of Alice Neel's life by Andrew Neel – *Alice Neel* – in which we see the artist working, allowing us to see the way that the artist begins a painting and the application of paint further on in the development of one of her portraits. She uses bold outlines as she establishes the drawing of the figure on the canvas, often in black or ultramarine. These drawn lines do remain to the end of the painting and we can see them in the work as we view it today.

I mention the film showing the artist working, because this is something quite new to us in the study of painting. Before the birth of photography and film we didn't have the opportunity to see how artists worked. The biggest clues we would have to an artist's practice would be to see an oil study, or a painting that had been abandoned in progress to give us an idea of how a painter may begin work or build up the paint surface from an under-drawing.

Neel's paintings are very intimate. As we look at someone we do not ordinarily hold their gaze with the intensity with which we observe them. When we are engaging with someone, looking at them face on, it is human nature to look away. But in the paintings of Alice Neel, her models stare out at us, holding our gaze. In doing so they look out across the space that connects us to them, therefore drawing us into their space. Staring out at the viewer has an intimacy and is also very demanding on the part of the sitter.

Not only did the painter so successfully characterize her sitter, penetrating almost violently into the human psyche, but she also epitomizes something about the era in which she lived, in her clothed portraits clearly showing the particular decade she was working, be it the 50s, 60s or 70s. Alice Neel believed that there was an individual reality that she could discover through painting someone.

It was while the painter was participating with the WPA (Works

Progress Administration, which provided relief to painters such as Neel) that she began to paint street scenes in various neighbourhoods and in doing so began to depict the social condition of the people. She isolated herself from the artistic scene when she later moved to Spanish Harlem as she said that she wanted to connect with real people, to observe the truth and to paint those having a hard life. It was important to her to get to know her sitters, when they were caught off guard, either angry or showing some other raw emotion.

One of the most striking and stark of Alice Neel's nudes is that of *John Perreault* (1972) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Here we see the nude male figure reclining on a bed, propped up by one arm and staring directly out towards us. Perreault was an artist, poet and curator but he was best known as an art critic. The shape of the reclining nude curves from the top left of the canvas through to the lower right. The legs, however, are parted creating a diamond shape, which along with the placing of his pelvis in the centre of the canvas emphasizes his genitals.

A number of Neel's female nudes show the model as heavily pregnant. Her painting *Margaret Evans Pregnant* (1978) in a private collection shows the figure placed vertically. The model, who was eight months pregnant at the time, seems perched on the tiniest boudoir chair and there is an air of discomfort about the whole painting. She sits very erect, she stares directly out at us; her gaze is unflinching. It is possible to clearly see the blue outlining around the figure in this painting. Following the outline of the figure, the painter would then start by painting the head. In Michel Auder's documentary film *Alice Painting Margaret* we see that Neel began by painting her model's distended belly, the focus of the painting, again placed centrally within the canvas. She is seen in the film building up the surface using broad circular brushstrokes.[10]

Other paintings in which we see the pregnant female form are *Pregnant Woman* (1971) and *Pregnant Julie and Algis* (1967). Both the

poses of these women are reclining, but we still sense a discomfort in these works, whether the model's gaze is detached or meets ours.

Alice Neel's portrait of her friend and artist *Andy Warhol* (1970) in the Whitney Museum of American Art shows a frank and persona view of this well-documented public figure. Posed stripped to the waist, we see the scars from his gunshot wounds in 1968. Warhol was said to be very sensitive about his looks and scars, yet he allowed Alice Neel to persuade him to sit in this manner despite his reticence. Much of this canvas remains unworked, with large areas of the canvas being left bare; the head and torso are the most complete with everything else left remaining rather sketchy which accentuates the vulnerability and isolation of the artist.

Alice Neel's nude *Self-Portrait* was completed towards the end of her life in 1980. She had begun the portrait five years earlier and had abandoned it, but was persuaded to continue it by her son Richard for submission to an exhibition of self-portraiture.

The resulting painting is a brutally frank representation of how the artist saw herself. The broad painterly areas are quite crude in places with a strong blue outline delineating her awkward seated pose, enlarged belly and sagging breasts. The blue vertical stripes on the chair in which the artist sits enhance the blue under-drawing, exaggerating it further. Again large areas of the canvas are left bare. The artist sits with her brush in hand, and her eyes stare out at us behind her glasses, as if to be able to examine us better.

Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

When we think of the contemporary nude or naked portrait, the paintings of Lucian Freud are amongst the first to come to mind. Exhibitions of his work prove to be more and more popular. His paintings are some of the most powerful and extraordinary images we

have of the contemporary nude.

The portraits and nudes of Lucian Freud are very intense and the viewer often finds this level of intimacy rather unsettling. Freud's small-scale portraiture is very compact, as the edge of the picture crops the composition and gives the feeling of observing the model from right up-close. He often uses this extreme compression of the image to powerful effect to create an almost voyeuristic intimacy. In his paintings of the 1950s his painted flesh has a cool pallor and the surface appears evenly lit. These aspects, along with the small-scale intimacy of the painting, suggest an influence of the Flemish masters.

One of Freud's earliest figure paintings is *Girl with a White Dog* (1950, Tate). Here the figure isn't totally nude, but we see her shoulder and breast where her gown has fallen. Her arm rests across her torso and her white dog lies next to her, his head resting on her knee. This is an incredible painting; the various textures are acutely observed. The flesh is luminous and the fabric of the gown and furnishings are finely executed. It is, however, the painting of the dog in this portrait which is exquisite both in execution and expression. The texture of the fur is beautifully painted, as is the weight and form through the torso of the dog. There is so much feeling in all of Freud's animal portraits – he demonstrated that he was one of the most sensitive painters of dogs and horses.

The painting entitled *Sleeping Head* became a turning point for Freud, as he felt that in painting the head alone he could perhaps express as much as when he painted the entire figure. In conversation with Lawrence Gowing he explained that he was '...going to do a nude, then realised that I could do it from the head.'[11]

Freud's models regularly included his family, in particular his daughters. The nude *Esther* painted in 1980 shows how the artist began to use paint more expressively as his career progressed. The paint has been laid down thickly with the direction of the mark-making being clearly visible. Esther sits, leaning into the sofa on which

she has been painted numerous times, which creates a curve running through the entire pose. Her right leg is tucked under her left knee making a triangle in the lower section of the canvas. She looks away from us, seemingly unaware of our intrusion.

In the catalogue of Freud's 1988 Hayward exhibition Robert Hughes writes: 'one is made poignantly aware of Freud's desire to show how the strictest formal expressiveness of the body comes from the body's own forms and not from the narratives it can be made to enact.'[12]

A series of remarkable paintings were the result of Lucian Freud's partnership with the performance artist Leigh Bowery. Freud painted Bowery intensively over a period of two years, when sometimes he modelled five days a week. Leigh Bowery offered up many possibilities to Freud and the resulting paintings are amongst some of the most powerful of his oeuvre. Many of these paintings are very large in scale, and the presence of the model is monumental in all ways. The 1990 painting *Leigh Bowery (seated)* shows the model seated in a red velvet chair, his leg cocked over the chair arm. His arm on the same side is draped over the back of the chair, echoing the position of the leg while his gaze meets ours as he stares down at us. In nearly all of his paintings of Bowery there is some level of discomfort, whether he reclines with his leg out straight supported by the edge of a mattress or standing under a skylight raised up on a high surface.

Of his later paintings, the male nude *Freddy Standing* (2000– 01) is a powerful image, a simple standing pose against a faded yellow wall, away from the contorted poses of many of the female nudes Freud painted.

Freud painted many self-portraits throughout his career but it was only when he turned 70 that he painted his nude self-portrait *Painter Working, Reflection* (1993). In this painting we see the artist standing, brandishing a palette knife in one hand with the other dropped to his side holding his palette. The pose is both challenging and submissive. This is a powerful and psychological portrayal of old age and self-

reflection. Here the artist paints himself full-length, but he still wears his unlaced boots as protection against splinters!

Over the surface of this painting it is possible to see how the paint layers have built up, in some areas they are very textured. In particular in areas that have been worked and re-worked many times, the paint has become thicker and thicker. The paint on the lower legs seems as encrusted as the paint on his palette. This is seen to the extreme in Freud's last paintings when the impasto surface became deeper and deeper with paint.

Euan Uglow (1932–2000)

Although Euan Uglow is well known for his paintings of nudes and still life, he painted many portraits throughout his career. His small portrait painting *Zoe* (1987–93) is an unusual composition in which we see a close-up and cropped view of his female model. Seemingly positioned in a reclining pose, the model's head is placed in the top right of the rectangle, the vertical line of her cheek falling exactly halfway along the canvas. Her arm is raised above her head, but we only see the upper arm which is painted in a series of beautiful cool greys. These appear quite mauve when seen alongside the warm yellows and pale oranges of her chest and shoulder.

The figure is positioned against a very dark warm grey background, and the dark tone of the model's hair almost disappears into it. What remains is a very dramatic shape of the figure, the verticality of her head and arm which contrasts with the horizontal chest and upper torso. This is further exaggerated as the bottom edge of the canvas intersects the centre of the shoulder and the line cuts straight through her breast. The left hand edge of the canvas then cuts through the other breast, further accentuating the crop of the composition.

This close cropping of the composition creates a sense of intimacy,

as we seem to occupy the model's space. Her gaze doesn't meet ours, however; she looks away into the distance and seems to be unaware of the viewer's presence.

There are many other artists whose work could be discussed within this category. For example, the bold male nudes of Sylvia Sleigh (1916–2010), the Welsh-born realist painter who lived and worked in America, and the powerful and symbolic nude self-portraits of Frida Kahlo (1907–54). Many contemporary artists working today continue to paint the nude in this manner, preoccupied in showing the psychological presence and personality of the sitter.



Nude with Blue Scarf.

Inspiration

The work of the artists whose paintings have been discussed in the first part of this chapter is of great inspiration to my own practice. These are the painters whose work I look at closely, and catalogues and books are always at hand in the studio. The following section discusses a number of my own paintings, which may be categorized as 'naked portraiture'.

Seated Girl

This small nude echoes the pose of an earlier clothed portrait entitled *Fragility*. Although this nude is smaller than the portrait, the pose and format is the same; a female figure sits close to the picture plane, gazing over to the right with her hands loosely clasped in her lap. This was the first time that this model (a friend) had sat for a nude and I feel that there is a sense of vulnerability, which has been captured. This was the first of a number of paintings of the same sitter but this remains the most 'naked' and bare.



Seated Girl.

Both this nude *Seated Girl* and *Fragility* use subtle palettes of cool greys that are reminiscent of, and influenced by, the figure paintings of Gwen John.



Fragility.

Yuki Seated with Tattoo

This striking model is painted slightly under life size. She sits looking

out at us, her blond beehive, heavily eye-lined eyes, and blue shadow make her an arresting image. As your eyes move down the painting the viewer is often doubtful as to what the dark shape snaking over her hip is. It is a large tattoo starting over the hip and running up her spine, so large that it is essential to paint it rather than ignore, such is its size. The Japanese girl who sat for this painting had sat for others before this, so by the time this painting was made I knew her very well. The scale and the directness of the painting, the gaze of the model, pose and attitude are all typical of those qualities that suggest a naked portrait.



Yuki Seated with Tattoo.

Yuki Seated

This next painting of the same sitter is a similar scale, with the model being painted just under life size. It is dramatically different in atmosphere to the 'tattoo' picture but it has been painted with a similar directness, despite the model sitting looking out to the left-hand side of the composition. The space around the figure is more cropped than in the previous painting so that she entirely fills the pictorial space.



Yuki Seated.

Narcissus

The initial idea for the pose of *Narcissus* grew out of seeing a number of Modigliani semi-reclining female nudes. At this time it was a particular interest to look at how the male nude could be portrayed in what would be a more typical female pose. So often we see in nineteenth-century academic paintings of the male nude the man standing, arm out-stretched and supported by a stick in a familiar repeated and typically masculine pose. We tend to view the female nude in a much more varied range of poses and the intention of this painting was to place the seated male nude in a more typically feminine pose. This idea can be seen in the paintings of Alice Neel, Sylvia Sleigh and Lucian Freud who also portrayed the male nude in this way.



Narcissus.

In *Narcissus* we see a close-up of the seated male figure, as he leans back slightly into the chair; it is a pose reminiscent of the Modigliani seated nudes. The cool pink drape was selected to be placed next to

and to enhance the pale, cool hues of the flesh. The model stares out at us, with a directness that people have found unnerving. The close proximity of the pelvis, and the placing of the genitalia right at the front of the picture plane leads the viewer up through the painting and finally to the head and makes contact with the eyes, resulting in an intimate and intense portrayal of the model.

Girl with a Red Scarf

This portrait was inspired by the painting *Portrait d'une negresse* (1800) by the female historical and Neoclassical painter Marie-Guillemine Benoist (1768–1826) which today is displayed in the Musee du Louvre, Paris. The painter, along with her artist sister, entered the atelier of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) in 1786, and throughout her career her work continued to reflect the influence of the French Neoclassical master.



Girl with Red Scarf.

Portrait d'une negresse shows a young black woman sitting; her head is elegantly draped with a white headscarf. The pose with her upper torso uncovered directly inspires the painting *Girl with a Red*

Scarf. We see the pose slightly more in profile than the *Red Scarf* painting, although the position of her torso and placing of her head both echo and influence the work. The young woman looks out of the picture but her gaze doesn't meet ours. The cool lights of both the headscarf and drape around her lower torso contrast beautifully with the dark, warm tones of her flesh.

The model in *Girl with a Red Scarf* has sat for a number of portraits over the years and each time red and pink hues have often featured in them. These colours help to pick out and accentuate the beautiful cool mauves and pinks seen as the light touches her skin. The headscarf she wears is saturated and warm, rich cadmium red, which further contrasts with the cools of her skin, the deep cool purples found on her lips, nipples and the skin around the eyes. Over the forehead, chest and shoulders you can clearly see the way that the colour has been patched in; edges of each colour plane remain to describe form and contour.

Silmara

This painting initially began as a nude study of the whole figure on a larger canvas. As the painting progressed I decided to abandon it and to concentrate only on the head and shoulders, rather than continuing with the full pose.



Silmara.

Does this painting of the head alone suggest a full nude in the way that Lucian Freud spoke of the head describing the full pose, and if so is the figure then required to suggest a naked portrait?

EXERCISE

Seated Nude

To embark on painting a nude, thinking of it in terms of a naked portrait, would be a difficult task to undertake without knowing the model. In its very nature the intensity and intimacy of this type of nude comes from knowing your model very well. It may be someone who you have painted on previous occasions, a close friend, a family member or even a nude self-portrait. The group of nude self-portraits by Schiele, Freud, Neel, and Spencer amongst many others have been created with the artists' analytical scrutiny, portraying themselves with an unforgiving eye.

The model for the painting *Seated Nude* has modelled for both myself and student groups often, and the idea for this piece came after seeing a painting of a seated male model by Ruskin Spear RA (1911–90). *The Portrait of Ernest Marsh*, *c*. 1954 (in the Royal Academy collection) is painted over a rich Indian red ground. Over the top of this colour the brushwork is loose and painterly in application. In between the loose brushstrokes and patches of paint, flecks of Indian red show through, which creates a lively and dynamic paint surface encouraging the eye to move freely over the composition. His model sat for Ruskin Spear often; the painter was said to be fascinated with the model's 'wonky eyes'.

The idea of placing the model in the red chair in the studio came almost immediately. The model's skin tone is very warm, in contrast to the pale and cooler tones of my recent paintings of female nudes. I wanted to accentuate the richness and warmth of the oranges of the skin against the deep rich crimsons of the red chair, experimenting with the way the reds could also subdue the temperature of the skin. The warm and cools of both oranges and reds influence how each is perceived when placed next to one another.

Setting up

The set-up of model and chair was placed against the window so that light would fall along one side of the figure and strongly model the form to create strong contrasts of light and shade. As light touches the skin it adds passages of cooler contrasts against all the warm colours. In the lightest passages, strong yet pale mauves, blues and greens can be picked out, contrasting with the warm oranges of the skin and the darker dominant crimson of the chair.

The pose is quite natural and straightforward, as I didn't want it to look too artificially contrived. As it is a sustained pose it will be repeated over a longer period of time, so it is essential that the pose can be returned to comfortably and easily each time after a break. This also seemed to be a natural pose for the model to hold without strain or discomfort, although all poses will eventually become uncomfortable!

Beginnings

Because of the overall dark and rich tonality of the colours in this composition it was decided at the start to prepare the canvas with a couple of thin coats of Indian red pigment. This layer of paint needs to be thin as it is the under-painting, yet the colour needed to have strength, so two dilute coats of paint were layered and then allowed to dry completely before painting could begin on top.

It is important that when working over any coloured ground it must be completely dry before beginning to work over the top, otherwise whatever colour or tone you place over it will mix with the colour underneath. Before you know it everything will be stained with the under colour!

First sitting

Once the pose has been established, the position of the model is marked using small pieces of masking tape, and then the position of the artist's feet are marked. This ensures that when returning to the pose after a break everything returns to the correct position as much as possible.

The figure was sketched in first of all using a thin wash of raw umber with a fine rigger brush. It was intended that the figure should be cropped just below the pelvis, and below the knee of the leg protruding forward. The rectangle of the canvas cutting close to the elbows creating an enclosed space, together with the dynamic of the diagonal moving from top left to lower right, echoes that of *Narcissus* or one of the seated Modigliani nudes. Lines over the torso and chair back show the initial drawing and measurement marks on the head and over the surface of the canvas.



Initial drawing and under-painting.

Working with a dilute umber wash was fine whilst making the initial drawing and measurements, but against the dark ground marks soon become confused so very early on colours were mixed in the light

and mid-tone ranges and then these were used to continue and check the drawing.

As you can see in the image above, large areas of colour have been patched in over the whole surface, simplifying each part of the figure with as few colour planes as possible. The contrasts of light and dark, warm and cool are established during this early stage. Areas of the red under-painting can be seen around the areas of colour and it is intended for some of these to show through at the end of the painting.



Detail of patches of colour on torso.

Next sitting

During the next session, the initial measuring was checked and re-

checked and areas of colour continued to be laid down as during the first session. Now more attention is given to making the paint thicker than it was during the previous sitting so that the paint surface begins to build up with thick paint placed over thinner layers, known as 'fat over lean', to prevent cracking as the paint dries.

During this painting the paint has had time to dry between sittings, so wet over wet isn't a problem. If you are working over a wet surface remember how paint can be 'tonked' or scraped down (as discussed in Chapter 5) to enable fresh paint to be placed over the top.

In this image which shows a detail of the torso, shapes of colour can be clearly seen with the drawing under-pinning the placing of each colour area; it also shows how the under-painting is being allowed to show through.



The paint surface builds up.

The paint surface slowly begins to build up.

Most of this session concentrates on the lower part of the figure and aims to make the top of the leg and knee read more successfully in

space. Without over-complicating the forms, the knee has to read as if it is coming right out of the picture-plane. So slabs of colour, light and dark, are placed quite solidly around the knee and thigh area. Next to this you can see how the arm of the chair has been simplified to large blocks of light, mid-tone and dark, warm and cool and then left alone.

More drawing then follows on the right hand with further definition of the planes on the thigh suggesting the weight of the hand pressing onto the surface, while the form of the top of the leg begins to move around.

Work has also continued on the head and hands, with more definition being given to the drawing of the head, smaller shapes and facets of colour begin to describe the planar structure of the face and scalp. You can see above how small shapes begin to describe the volume and dimensions of the head without focusing on too much detail. At this stage don't worry too much about 'a likeness': this will come as the abstract shapes and small facets of colour pull together to describe the form of the head. Once the proportions of the underlying structure of the head are correct, the features and with them 'the likeness' will be established.



Drawing continues using mixed colour over the larger patches.

The image overleaf shows a close-up of work continuing on the head during this session. The form has become a little fragmented where, for example, the surface running across the forehead and the

area around the nose has become a little too complicated. The next session will begin by simplifying these areas.

The intensity of the reds required in the painting means that during each session fresh pigment is generously layered and applied. The transparent nature of the reds being used, particularly alizarin crimson, means that they will need to be layered several times to get the level of richness and saturation of colour needed.





Close-up of work on head and upper torso.

During each sitting, therefore, time is devoted to the building up of colour of the background and chair.

It is important to do this while your model is present and in the same pose. It is tempting to continue to work on a background when the model isn't there, but whenever you are working from observation in this manner, it is important that all the components of the composition are present. Without everything being in front of you as you paint it becomes difficult to make decisions about all relationships of tone, colour and temperature of each colour, as one small part affects how you perceive everything else.

You may think that it saves time to paint other areas when your model isn't present, but it doesn't help as when the model returns you may find that the surrounding tones are wrong.

The next session began by applying more dark red on the chair to the right of the model's head. The previous layer of paint had sunk as it dried, which made the colour appear dull and lifeless. If you are using a palette of darker colours when painting you may find that the dark tones do tend to sink into the surface until the layers of colour build up enough so that the surface remains saturated and not 'flat'. A medium such as linseed oil can now be used in the colour mixes so that colour remains rich but not dilute. Using linseed oil I continued to work on the reds of the chair before moving on to the figure.



Colour patches over the torso.

Once I began to work on the figure again, I concentrated on the head for the rest of the session. During this time I decided to simplify the planes of colour describing the head as I felt that after the previous

session the shapes were not correct and had become a bit of a distraction. The focus had become a little too detailed and the form needed to be simplified further when compared to the rest of the painting.

Colour was mixed and re-applied in the darkest passages of the skin, under the hand, chin and the top of the chest; the colour needed to be dark in tone, yet as vibrant in saturation as possible.

The deepest crimson in the painting is made with a mix of Alizarin with a small amount of Indian red while the more vivid areas of light on the chair are made with a mix of Alizarin and cadmium red. The blue undertones already present in Alizarin are enough to make the cooler deep reds contrast with the warmer orange reds within the torso.



Simplifying the head.

Getting your eye in

It is helpful when beginning each new session to begin work on the large colour planes surrounding your figure while 'getting your eye in' and then to move to the more subtle harmonies of the flesh a little later in the sitting.

Evaluation

During the last session a lot of linseed oil has been used in each of the red mixes to help the colour remain bright and saturated, as the darker tones had been drying rather flat and dull before this. The overall dark tonality of the painting and the resulting shininess of the oil and wet paint began to affect decisions made during the colour mixing and it became rather difficult. The reds in particular are very slow drying. It was therefore decided to let the surface completely dry before continuing.



After further work on head and background area.

This gave me the opportunity to spend time looking at the painting over a period of weeks. It is a useful process to give yourself time to do this. Sometimes a little distance can be extremely helpful during the painting process: you may reach a point when things aren't going as you wish or you cannot see things clearly enough to be able to make a useful decision about how to proceed.

Once the painting had been left in the studio for a while, to allow the paint surface to dry and for the colours to settle, decisions could be made about how to continue the painting.

Looking at the painting afresh I realized that more work was now needed on the head rather than anywhere else. This was the first thing I addressed during the early part of this next sitting. The features needed to be better defined, but without the patches of colour describing the head becoming too tight or detailed when compared with the way that colour had been applied during the painting of the figure.

Once the problem areas had been changed – the length of the left eye, the position of the edge of the cheek, and the area of dark on the side of the nose – I began to make adjustments to some of the colours over the neck and chest.

With the surface now dry I could clearly see how the dark colours of the chair and background appeared. The chair back immediately to the right of the face has a design stitched into the fabric. Up to now I had ignored this, thinking that it would be too distracting, although I was conscious that this large flat area of dark within the composition didn't quite work so close to the head.

On another recent portrait, when I suggested the design in this area of red it did in fact immediately pull the painting together. So I decided to go with the idea and to try painting a suggestion of the design to see how it looked. (What is added can always be removed at a later stage if it doesn't work.)

The brushstrokes to the right of the head begin to suggest the design of the fabric. The strokes when applying the paint were fluid, working quickly over the area so that the surface texture and contour of the form is described without becoming too detailed or exact.

Throughout most of the sitting I concentrated on the top half of the canvas: the head, shoulders, chest and background. Once this area begins to read better I return to the lower half of the canvas and look at the arms, hands, and in particular the left knee during the following session.



Seated Nude.

The last sitting

After much study of the painting between sessions, and with the progress that had been made during the most recent sitting I felt that it wasn't necessary to do very much more during this final session. The paint application has remained fluid and in many places the colour patches and energy in the brushwork remain as free and sketchy as intended from the outset.

During recent sittings the paint has become much thicker, and the addition of more oil to the mix has resulted in the colours becoming brighter and remaining saturated. Because I have used a palette of darker colours in this painting it has taken a number of layers of paint to achieve the resulting vibrancy and richness of colour that is now beginning to happen. It has taken a long time to build up the layers of paint for the colour to begin to do this but do persevere, the depth of colour will increase as you add each layer. The oil mixed into the colours will add a shine to the surface, as if it is still wet and this visually helps to stop the darker colours appearing dull and flat.

Throughout this sitting any paint added to the surface is once again thicker than before, being layered quite generously, particularly within in the darker tones. The red mixes used for the chair are mostly made with an alizarin crimson base and so they are transparent. As each layer has been added the colour from the previous layers shines through, so that each colour influences how the final colour will appear.

Following further work on the face and supporting hand, the hand which is placed on the thigh, and shadow, and with more structural description of the left knee, it was decided to stop work on the painting.

My initial intention had been to make a large-scale painting of the model, both a nude and a portrait at the same time with a colour palette that is much darker and brighter than I would normally use. The fluid and sketchy treatment of the brushwork still allowed for small areas of the Indian red under-painting to come through in the

final image. The painting is a study of contrasting reds and oranges, warm and cool, light and dark.

I felt that my intentions had been achieved by this stage and any further work could result in passages of the painting becoming too tight and perhaps over-worked, losing the fluency and gestural quality of the paint application. Drawing has continued through to the end of the painting, with lines delineating and accenting structural shape and form.

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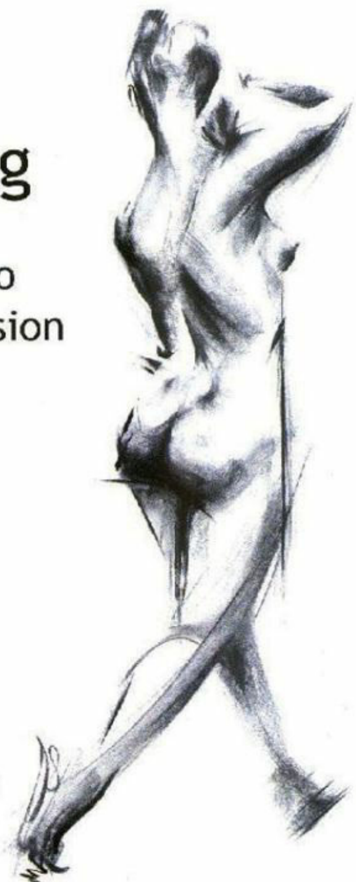
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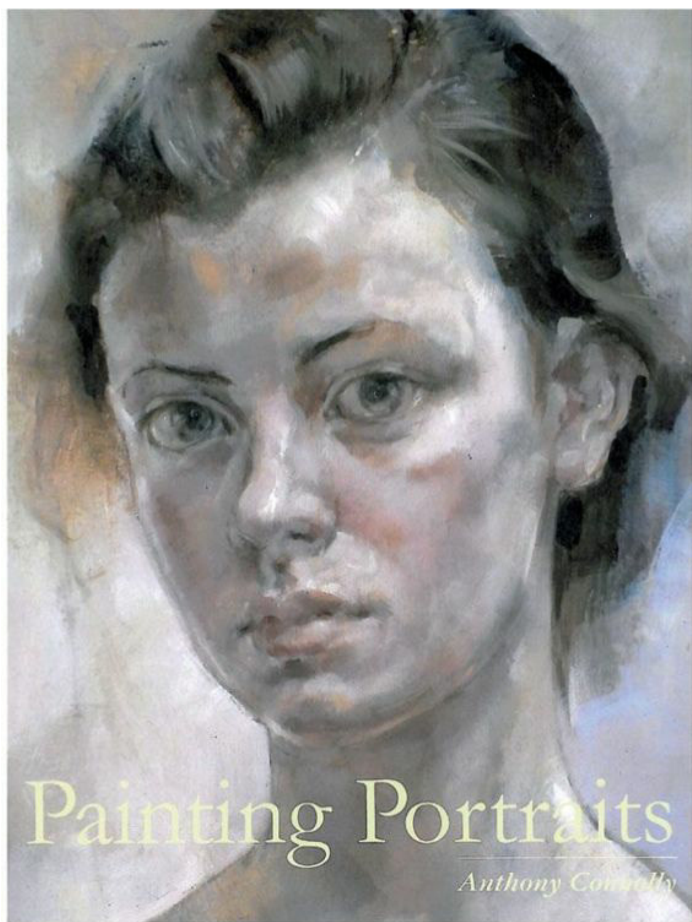


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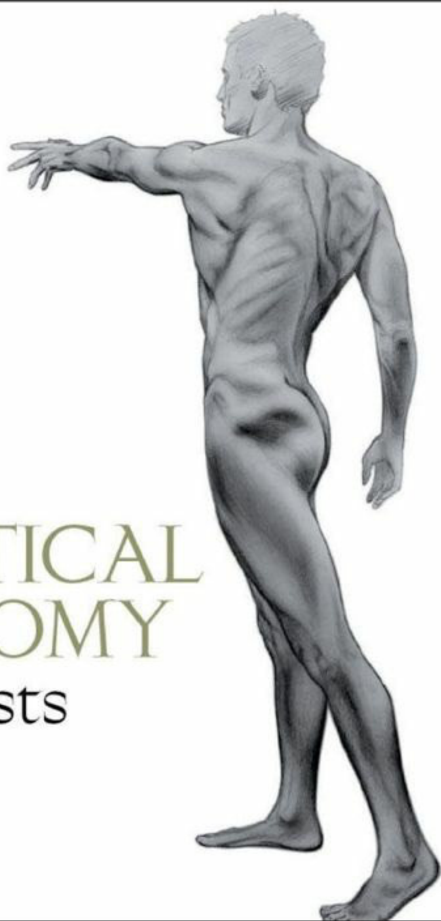

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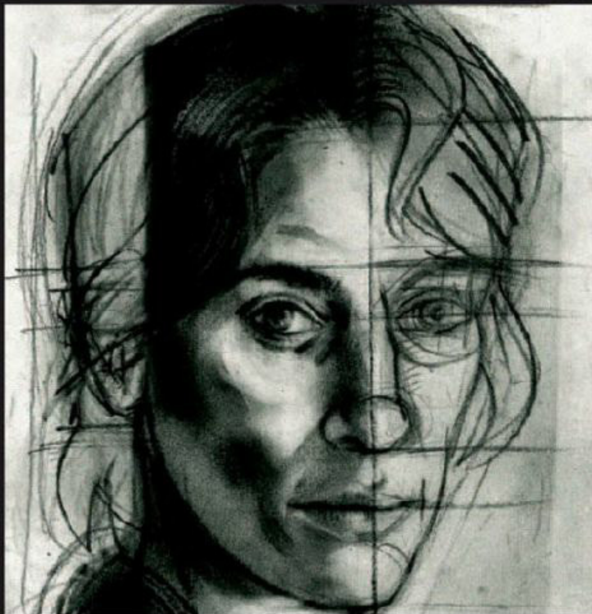


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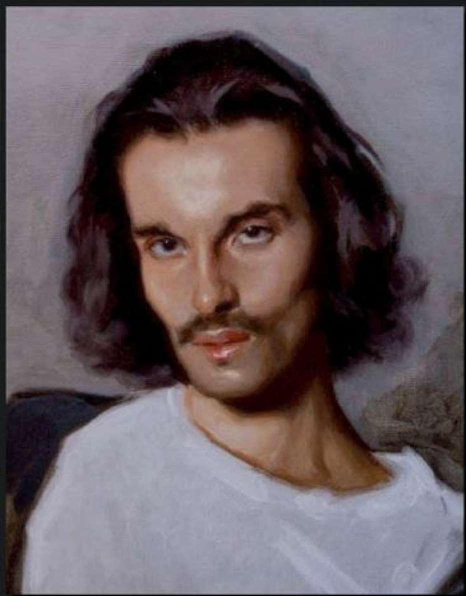
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